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NIETZSCHE'S *ÜBERMENSCH* IN THE HYPERREAL FLUX:

AN ANALYSIS OF *BLADE RUNNER*, *FIGHT CLUB*, AND *MIAMI VICE*

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to apply Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch* and Baudrillard's ideas about simulation and hyperreality to the films *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. In doing so, these films can be understood thematically in terms of their respective narrative progressions. In each, the protagonist undertakes a journey in which he is subjected to numerous challenges and obstacles that test his strength, toughness, and resolve. Through processes identified by Nietzsche as the *overcoming* and the *becoming*, these challenges and obstacles are surmounted and the protagonists learn to master themselves and their reality. In each film, reality is a complex and mercurial concept, as there are powerful and ever-present elements of simulation that threaten to overwhelm and consume the protagonists. This omnipresent simulacra (described as a state of hyperreality by Baudrillard) represents a critical obstacle in all three films, and is the most formidable factor that the protagonists must contend with and *overcome*.

When *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* are examined through the critical lenses of Nietzsche and Baudrillard, they can be understood as lessons of self-reliance and self-improvement through the *overcoming* of hardships. In narratives in which reality has become a fluid and indefinable concept, this loss of stability and the confusion that results from it are the key dynamics that must be *overcome* by the protagonists. When this is achieved, the protagonists reach a higher plane of self-awareness and self-mastery, and are thus able to master their demanding hyperrealities.

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I.

Introduction

Superior synthetic humanoids. Dissociative identity disorder. Undercover vice cops. While at first glance these concepts may seem to exist in mutually exclusive universes, they play important parts in three films that offer insight on who we are, where we are, and where we're going as humankind navigates its way through the uncertain and confusing waters at the outset of a new millennium. In a dense and sensory-overloaded world, technologically-created human replicants force humans to question the nature of all existence in *Blade Runner*. In another cold, stultifying urban cityscape, a thoroughly average man desperately searches for a way to reconnect not only with others, but with himself in the face of a repressive media-dominated society in *Fight Club*. And in a world eerily resembling a present-day reality vision of *Blade Runner*'s techno-media nightmare dystopia, the two flawed detectives of *Miami Vice* must subjugate their true identities and existences in favor of simulated criminal covers in order to infiltrate the very underworld they seek to bring down – and risk falling prey to, both physically and morally. These three films come together is a nexus of identity, reality, and existence; they ask questions about what the nature of each is, how they interconnect, and what their relationships are to humankind's future.

My purpose is to explore these questions and add my voice to the canon of writers who have so richly meditated on the natures of identity, existence, and reality. More specifically, I wish to explore what *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* can tell us

about ourselves, the lives we lead, and the culture and society we inhabit. By looking through two distinct critical lenses, I wish to investigate issues of identity, the journey to self-awareness, and the challenges and stresses of life in confusing and complex societies as they are portrayed and fictionalized in these three films.

This study will be an analysis of three films. The first is *Blade Runner* (1982)[1], Ridley Scott's sci-fi masterpiece about the ambiguity and transience of existence. Next will be *Fight Club* (1999), David Fincher's statement about modern American life's shortcomings and the effects they may have on the male psyche. Finally, I will examine Michael Mann's *Miami Vice*, a 2006 film adaptation and update of his iconic 1980s television series that studies the rift between simulated and actual identities and the stresses of living only half a life of each identity. These films all focus on dual identities and the *overcoming* of the pressures and obstacles of life in the flux of a simulated reality. Thus, they are well-matched to the philosophies and concepts that I will utilize.

The challenges and questions that face the characters in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* are especially demanding because of their immense and yet mercurial nature; the cultures and societies that these characters inhabit reflect these qualities. All of the protagonists in these films have their obstacles to *overcome* and their journeys to reconcile themselves to and not only persist upon, but indeed embrace. What makes these journeys so dense and exhausting has much to do with the omnipresent media and technology of the societies the protagonists occupy – the sheer size and unrelenting power of the machinery of these cultures and societies threaten at all times to overwhelm

[1] The version of *Blade Runner* being examined in this analysis is the "Final Cut" version (2007).

and consume our heroes if they don't remain mindful of it – or, even more terrifying, allow themselves to succumb to it. The characters in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* are the first generation to find themselves pitted against said machinery, and also at its mercy. So these are characters that we find – and who find themselves – in uncharted waters. They are our screen counterparts of the same generation; their journey is ours. Whether or not we are cognizant of it, we are all journeying through a world in which we find ourselves reshaped and redefined by the forces we have ourselves created.

This journey to which I am referring is best described by Friedrich Nietzsche, who illustrated and elucidated it most directly in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883 – 1885). He envisioned it as both a *becoming* and an *overcoming*; the *becoming* was the journey itself, one of transformational and transcendental proportions. It both led to and was achieved through the *overcoming* – the process by which obstacles, illusions, and especially pain were confronted and, once again, embraced. If the traveler subjected himself willingly to these trials with the sense that such exposure was both necessary and vital to his growth and ultimate contentment, he would find that he not only had the inner strength to succeed on this journey, but that he grew stronger and smarter because of it. This dynamic is central to the three films that will be analyzed and is at the heart of the themes and objectives that relate them to one another.

The themes of *becoming* and *overcoming* can be seen in a kind of progression in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. In *Blade Runner*, the protagonist must *overcome* his disconnection, jadedness, and loss of identity if he is to take control of the circumstances of his existence and *become* his own master. He must find his place in his

world and embrace it, if he is to find the strength to live interactively in it. The protagonist in *Fight Club* has a similar journey to undertake, but his journey also involves *overcoming* not only the obstacles presented by his surroundings, but also those buried deep within his psyche. And after the neat and tidy, beginning-to-end narrative journeys of these two films comes *Miami Vice*, in which the journey of the main protagonist has already begun before we've met him, and will continue after we leave him. His is an ongoing, fluctuating *becoming* in the truest Nietzschean sense.

The other major factor that connects and correlates *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* is the overwhelming and inescapable hyperreality present in each. In all three films, the obstacles, illusions and pains that must be met and *overcome* are products of life in the technological, media-saturated societies that the characters inhabit. The resulting anomie and loss of identity, interpersonality, and reality are the major sources of pain and confusion for these characters, and these issues also represent the challenges and obstacles that our subjects must *overcome*. These are not trials that our subjects need to submit themselves to per se; they are unavoidable by the very nature of their ubiquity. What our subjects must do is accept and meet these challenges and obstacles, embrace them, and be willing to suffer throughout their journeys. This is a Herculean undertaking; once again, what our subjects are up against is loss of identity, interpersonality, and reality itself. The strength that will be needed is neither easily found nor sustained.

The inability to recognize and sustain reality is key; it is through these breakdowns that all other collapses and dissolutions result. Identity is a concept that is by

nature interactive; it is a product of the recognition of one's surroundings and its inhabitants, and the subsequent interaction with these elements. It is then identity that allows and fosters the processes that lead to the forming of relationships and thus the foundation of society. In all three films, these processes are complicated by the fact that reality is no longer stable and easily grasped and/or interacted with. It has become opaque and uncertain, and what has taken its place is synthetic and unreliable. What was once (and should ideally be) objective, lucid, and constant has been replaced by something mercurial, autonomous, and – perhaps most terrifying – without history. It is this shift, this transition, that Jean Baudrillard was relating when he spoke about hyperreality – the condition that occurs when the reality that one finds one's self in is no longer that, but is instead a prefabricated simulation such as those created and maintained by the mechanisms and mass media that the protagonists have come to so rely upon. No longer does reality dictate and determine what follows; it is instead what is judged *should* be reality – what is *anticipated* to be reality – that has replaced the genuine article. This new condition – this entirely new paradigm – destroys what it was meant to replicate. Hyperreality becomes *more real than real* – that is, the replica outdoes the real, and is so ingrained and accepted that the real is no longer functional or even necessary. Reality, as it was, has been rendered obsolete. The trauma and fallout from this radical shift are all over the three films which I will examine during the course of this analysis; the journey through which the protagonists of the films trek – their *becoming* – is filled with obstacles and challenges directly resulting from said trauma and fallout, which of course must be *overcome*.

The dynamics and conflicts described above are abundantly evident in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. In *Blade Runner*, Rick Deckard finds himself pressed back into service for a cause he no longer wants any part of. He is a Blade Runner, and it is his very profession to hunt and eliminate the technologically engineered *replicants* – autonomous, sentient beings who are so advanced in their biological engineering that they have surpassed the "real" humans who created them. Deckard has become so jaded and disconnected from everything and everyone (including himself) by his work (murder) that he cannot feel anything anymore. Because his is a world in which humanity's place has been undermined and destabilized, and Deckard has been charged with destroying the "cause" of these factors, Deckard must kill – or "retire," as it is called – the replicants, who are treated as faulty machinery by their creators despite the fact that they are acknowledged by the "real" humans to be superior in their design and function. Deckard has fallen into a rut; he has stalled along his journey, and it is precisely the obstacles and challenges presented by the world of simulation and hyperreality that he must face and *overcome*.

In *Fight Club*, we meet a nameless white-collar drone who has sold his soul to consumerism and corporate America and hates himself for it. Like Deckard, he has become disconnected and dissociated from everyone, especially himself. He too is aware of the simulated nature of the world he inhabits and the settings he drifts in and out of, and for a while he is content to remain stalled and lethargic. But inside him is a burgeoning drive – a desire to reclaim his identity and break free from his corporate masters. He becomes proactive in his *becoming* – awkwardly at first, and then with a

passion and strength he could not have imagined he possessed. His quest to find and reconnect with something "real" takes him to the darkest places imaginable, both within himself and without. His *becoming* is thus flush with challenges and obstacles, from his simulated realities as well as his damaged psyche.

This brings us to *Miami Vice*, in which simulation and disconnection from the real are the very essences of the lives the protagonists lead. We meet detectives Crockett and Tubbs while they are in the midst of their simulated world. Undercover in a flashy nightclub, trying to take down an archcriminal while impersonating archcriminals themselves, their simulated reality is interrupted when Crockett receives a call from the "real" world, one that ends in an abrupt and tragic manner. The force and gravity of their simulated realities, combined with the balancing act required to live on both sides of the law they are attempting to defend and enforce, make for powerful and dangerous challenges and obstacles that must be *overcome*; if Crockett and Tubbs are to survive, physically *and* emotionally, their *becoming* is the only thing that can save them.

The primary critical lens will be Nietzsche; his ideas and philosophies about humankind's great *becoming* will be central to my analysis, especially his concept of the *Übermensch* (or "Overman," meaning humankind's next social-philosophical evolutionary phase), and how it is portrayed and examined by contemporary filmmakers. The secondary critical lens will be Baudrillard; I will use his concepts and views of the effects of life in a simulated reality, living a simulated identity and/or existence, and life in the flux of the hyperreal to form a kind of bridge between Nietzsche's concepts and those of the films I will analyze. The dynamic that plays itself out in *Blade Runner*,

Fight Club, and *Miami Vice* is that of Nietzschean protagonists living in Baudrillardian worlds. *Blade Runner*'s Deckard, The Narrator in *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*'s Crockett and Tubbs are all endeavoring to face and *overcome* the challenges and obstacles of their personal and professional lives as they journey towards greater strength, toughness, and autonomy – the *becoming*. In each film, this journey is undertaken in a world trapped in a state of perpetual and omnipresent hyperreality. The hyperreal situations and forces that Baudrillard describes are crucial to the Nietzschean factors that are operating simultaneously in the films I will be exploring. Nietzsche's mythic concept of an ideal human model and Baudrillard's ideas of the hyperreal fit synergistically with each other; the pressures and obstacles of life in the flux of Baudrillard's simulated hyperreality must be *overcome* in order for the films' protagonists to journey through their *becoming* towards self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-reliance – both in the physical and spiritual realms.

II.

The Critical Lenses

Beginning in 1883, with the publication of the first part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche professed to the world his concept of the ideal individual. He continued to meditate on the characteristics and drives of this individual in 1888 with the writing of *Ecce Homo*, though this work would not see publication until 1908, 8 years after Nietzsche's death. The man in question[2] was to be one who had come to know and master himself and his environment, and one who would willingly subject himself to the trials and obstacles that came his way and were part of life in general. This individual would grow stronger, more self-aware, and more self-reliant as a result of such exposure. Nietzsche called this individual the *Übermensch*, or *Overman*. He was to represent the next phase of human evolution in the social-philosophical sense, and as such was a mythic concept of an ideal human model. The structure of the philosophical narrative of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* takes the form of the character and protagonist Zarathustra explaining what a man needs to do and face in order to *become*. The work unfolds in a chronological progression elucidating the journeys of the *overcoming* and the *becoming*; the further one reads, the more one learns about what one must face and *overcome* so that one can further the *becoming*.

The narrative structure of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* will be echoed in the narrative structures of *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club*, and to a lesser extent in *Miami Vice*. In the

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[2]The masculine pronoun is used for congruency with the major characters from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the protagonists from the three films being analyzed. *Übermensch* is intended to be understood as a gender-neutral term. Although Nietzsche did have radically different ideas concerning men and women and what their social roles and goals should be, he did intend for the philosophies and concepts involving the *becoming* and the *overcoming* to be gender-neutral as well.

former two films, we meet the protagonists before the *overcoming* and the *becoming* have begun, and there is resolution and a sense of finality to their respective journeys when the narratives of these films end. In *Miami Vice*, there are the journeys of the *overcoming* and the *becoming* that we observe the protagonists undertaking, but in this film these journeys are well underway before the narrative begins, and will continue long after the narrative ends. The narrative similarity between these four works is a testament to the extent to which these three films portray the Nietzschean journeys of the *overcoming* and the *becoming*.

The *Übermensch* represents Nietzsche's philosophy on humankind's desire and drive for the creation of a greater and more powerful human identity; it was the *struggle* that was the key, and through the struggling and the suffering and the striving would come a stronger, more enlightened, and more evolved man – an *Overman*. This *Übermensch* would not be distracted or defeated in his quest by complacency, pity, and egalitarianism. His goal was singular and forthright: to reach the summit of his potential. The *Übermensch* would be he who had achieved the full potential of his capability and his endurance – he would be living both in his world and with it, and it would be only this world and this life that there was for him. There will be nothing too great or too difficult for the *Übermensch* to *overcome* and master, for since he is a product of his world, he must belong there, and thus can and must *overcome* all that challenges and obstructs him in it.

It is important to note that *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was written as a philosophical text in the form of a fictional narrative; Nietzsche was expressing his views on what the goals of the individual should be and how best to achieve them. He did not intend for his

book to be taken literally, and he was not contending that there were or had ever been actual people in the world who had attained the status of an *Übermensch*. This is precisely why Nietzsche chose the form of a narrative centered on a fictional character, just like those characters that appear in the narratives of *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. These films tell their stories just as Nietzsche told his, and they posit their own philosophies and concepts in doing so. The concern of this analysis is how these four narratives relate to and seem to build off of each other.

Nietzsche declared that there was a process by which a man becomes an *Overman*. He called this process the *overcoming*. This involves the subjection to life's challenges and obstacles, the struggling and suffering that comes with this subjection, and the ultimate success over and mastery of the obstacles and the circumstances that led to these challenges. It is a process of self-assessment and self-adversity; one cannot understand his true self or the true nature of his world if he never experiences life in that world to its fullest. To do this, he must experience all aspects of life in this world, even the most difficult and painful. It is only through *overcoming* these hardships that a man can live his life to its fullest, and only then will he be the master of himself, his life, and his environment and its circumstances. If he can do these things, then this man will become an *Übermensch*.

Nietzsche asserted that the second process involved in the evolution into an *Übermensch* is the *becoming*. The *becoming* is a product of the *overcoming*. Through the conquering of one's challenges and obstacles and the subsequent attainment of greater strength and wisdom, one enters this state of *becoming*. In this state, one is in a perpetual condition of flux – never complete, never finished, never final. The *Übermensch* is thus

never in a state of *being*, but always in this state of *becoming*. The transition of one into an *Übermensch* is not a finite process. It has no end and no ultimate point at which the journey is complete. Thus, the state of *becoming* is itself the goal – for one to always be growing, learning, and evolving. As long as one lives, one *becomes*, ideally. *Becoming* is thus a life-affirming process; it is through living this life to the fullest (good and bad, positive and negative, simple and difficult) and to the peak of one's potential that one *becomes*. *Being*, as in to *be*, would be life in a dreaded state of complacency, and thus inertia. There is no time for such wastefulness in life. Do not *be*, Nietzsche's Zarathustra instructs. *Become*.

Nietzsche explicitly instructed that the *overcoming* and the *becoming* were the primary responsibilities of the individual, and that anyone not actively participating in and furthering these journeys was hurting all of humankind by stalling its collective evolution. Man – silly, oafish Man – needed to be *overcome* so that the next echelon of human consciousness and experience could be reached.

> All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or a painful embarrassment . . . (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 22)

Nietzsche definitively establishes what is at stake, and how far humankind has to go. The *becoming* is nothing short of an evolution into a superior state; one undertaking this

journey must not only transition into the next phase, but must also leave his previous self behind. This element of stratification is a critical aspect of the Nietzschean journey.

This stratification involves the disparity seen in the films between the actual selves of the protagonists and their idealized selves, so to speak, and it is an element that is narrativized just as the gap between humankind and the *Übermensch* is in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In *Blade Runner*, the superior beings take the form of the replicants. Though they are at first dismissed as nothing more than humanoid imitations engineered for mechanical purposes, it becomes undeniable during the course of the film that they are far more than this, and that humankind – and especially Deckard – can and should learn much from them. In *Fight Club*, The Narrator has Tyler Durden, the man who embodies everything The Narrator believes for a time that he wishes to be. And in *Miami Vice*, there is Crockett and Tubbs, and there is Burnett and Cooper – the latter pair being the simulated criminal identities that the protagonists adopt to infiltrate the underworld that they endeavor to sabotage. The presence of these stronger, tougher identities haunts the protagonists throughout the narratives of the films; they act as doppelgangers that persistently shadow the protagonists and remind them of all that they still must confront and *overcome*. This factor of stratification is a crucial component in the *becoming* of said protagonists, and will be addressed in detail during the sections of this analysis committed to each film.

Nietzsche also wrote about what he expects individuals to do in order to embark on their *becoming*, and where this journey begins and will take place:

> It is here and nowhere else that one must make a start in order to understand what Zarathustra *wants*: the kind of man he conceives,

> conceives reality *as it is*: it is strong enough for that – it is not alienated from it, not at one removed from it, it is *reality itself*, it has all its terrible and questionable aspects, too; *that is the only way man can have greatness* . . . (*Ecce Homo* 92)

So Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a forceful, durable individual who possesses the courage and fortitude to stare down "reality as it is," however unfair and unrelenting this reality may be. The traveler must not merely refuse to blink or flinch, but must actually *overcome* and master said reality.

About this reality, Nietzsche describes the finality of earthly life, and the place of the *Übermensch* in it:

> The Superman[3] is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: The Superman SHALL BE the meaning of the earth! I conjure you, my brethren, REMAIN TRUE TO THE EARTH, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them! Once blasphemy against God was the greatest blasphemy; but God died, and therewith also those blasphemers. (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 23)

Nietzsche makes it unequivocally clear that the *Übermensch* is the highest form of sentient, willful life that there is, and it is he who is master of the reality that we live in.

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[3] "Superman" is the translation of *Übermensch* used by Thomas Common in his translation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. *Overman* is the more direct translation, and for the purposes of this analysis, I feel that it is also the most appropriate. The *Übermensch* is not intended by Nietzsche to be viewed as "superhuman," but as living to the full extent of human potential. The *Übermensch* is an *ideal* man and is thus indeed *over* man, but is not a "*super*man;" "*Übermensch*" is meant to signify the stratification between humankind as it exists in the present tense in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and the next level of its evolution.

One cannot evolve and *become* if one clings to wishful beliefs of an all-powerful caretaker for himself who will provide a second, better life after death. The *Übermensch* is his own one-and-only caretaker in his one-and-only life, and to believe otherwise is to sabotage one's *becoming*. God no longer has any place or meaning in the reality that Nietzsche illustrates, and anyone who contradicts this is the enemy of all humankind, for they seek to impair and bring down the *Übermensch* and keep humankind subservient to their fictitious, tyrannical God who encourages complacency and inertia – the mortal enemies of the *overcoming* and the *becoming*. Nietzsche continues:

> To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadfulest sin, and to rate the heart of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth! Once the soul looked contemptuously on the body, and then that contempt was the supreme thing: -- the soul wished the body meager, ghastly, and famished. Thus it thought to escape from the body and the earth. Oh, that soul was itself meager, ghastly, and famished; and cruelty was the delight of that soul! But ye, also, my brethren, tell me: what doth your body say about your soul? Is your soul not poverty and pollution and wretched self-complacency? Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream without becoming impure. Lo, I teach you the Superman: he is that sea; in him can your great contempt be submerged. What is the greatest thing ye can experience? It is the hour of great contempt. The hour in which even your happiness becometh loathsome unto you, and so also your reason and virtue. (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 23)

The reality that the *Übermensch* exists in is solely an earthly one; Nietzsche views any and all beliefs in an afterlife or any kind of spiritual, "superearthly" existence as hindrances to the *becoming* because they remove the focus of the individual from realizing his earthly, entirely human potential. Such a distraction will inevitably lead to the dreaded state of "self-complacency." The goal instead should be to achieve a state in which any kind of contentment, happiness, or higher faith is viewed as the same kind of hindrance to and distraction from the *becoming*.

Nietzsche goes on to write about the struggle and the vital importance of conflict and confrontation to the *becoming*:

> Ye say it is the good cause which halloweth even war? I say unto you: it is the good war which halloweth every cause. War and courage have done more great things than charity. Not your sympathy, but your bravery hath hitherto saved the victims. "What is good?" ye ask. To be brave is good. Let the little girls say: "To be good is what is pretty, and at the same time touching." (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 59)

For one to *become*, one must set aside life's frivolities and be willing to put one's self to the ultimate tests, especially war. These "wars" may be different for each individual, but the form they take is not the point. What is essential is that those on the journey push themselves to their very limits, especially those found on the edges of battle.

These themes and concepts Nietzsche put forth can be clearly seen in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. In all three films, the protagonists are strong, tough, and proactive individuals. Because of these qualities, none of them harbor any illusions about their respective realities, which is an accomplishment in and of itself given how

harsh these realities are. As a testament to this, it is in fact this very knowledge and the steely-eyed accurate assessment of said realities that causes the anomie and pain that eats away at these protagonists. But as Nietzsche teaches, it is this knowledge and vision that is the crucial first step of the *becoming*.

There is also no place in any of these three films for God or spirituality. The protagonists exist only in the worlds around them; these existences are not only to the exclusion of "superearthly" existences or factors, but are even devoid of a past and a future. "God is dead," to paraphrase the citation from page 23 of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – you're on your own, Nietzsche is telling us, and you're better off for it. In such a reality it is imperative that one live life to the fullest extent of its potential. This is the only life we will ever have, so we had better make the most of it while the brief chance is ours, and what better way to do this than to learn to *overcome* and master this reality that is entirely ours? This is also reality for the protagonists of *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. There is no world outside of the one immediately inhabited; there exists only a perpetual present, and this is exactly the kind of existence that Zarathustra would command. The significance of this element cannot be overstated; it is in the moment that life is experienced most intensely, and it is this kind of exposure and force that furthers the *becoming*. Nietzsche writes:

> Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the frenzy with which ye should be inoculated? Lo, I teach you the Superman: he is that lightning, he is that frenzy! . . . Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous crossing, a

> dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous trembling and halting. (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 24-25)

The *becoming* should be a like a lightning strike that shocks those experiencing it into action; it is a series of these effects that keep the traveler in the moment, always facing some new challenge, and always in a state of flux. Certainly the protagonists in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* have no shortage of such moments. *Blade Runner*'s Deckard always has the next replicant to identify, the next kill to prepare for, and the endless reflecting on what it all means and who it all makes him. In *Fight Club*, The Narrator has the next fight, the next "homework assignment," the next test of his strength and his endurance under Tyler's philosophizing and manifestos. And in *Miami Vice*, Crockett's and Tubbs's entire careers are based around a non-stop present – being who they have to be, gaining access, and making the deals. It's always a wearying way to live, but it is these factors that keep the protagonists sharp and focused on their respective *becoming*.

Perhaps the most vital Nietzschean factor in the journeys of the films' protagonists is the fact that they all are waging their own wars, both within themselves and without. Deckard fights both the replicants and what his profession and his loss of human identity and human connection do to him. The Narrator comes to battle with his very culture and society, but is ultimately battling with his lack of identity, control, and companionship. Crockett and Tubbs are at war with the criminals they pursue, but also must fight the pressure and stresses of living diametrically opposed dual identities that force other aspects of life to the margins. These battles are what further the *becoming*; as

Nietzsche asserts, they sweep away the illusions and distractions, narrow the focus, and repeatedly test the potency and fortitude of the protagonists.

The concepts of the *Übermensch*, the *becoming*, and the *overcoming* all speak to the initiative of going beyond what humanity is, or is accepted to be. They aspire to reach a new paradigm, what could be broadly described as "human-plus." *Blade Runner* employs a similar expression: "More human than human." The idea that humanity – the very human identity – is unfinished in its present state and can be expanded upon, redefined, and/or taken to new heights is a central initiative of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as well as *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. All of these works analyze and comment upon where the human identity and existence are by exploring where they could go next. A critical aspect of all four works is that they address the future of the human identity and experience, based upon the status of these concepts as they exist to us now.

As discussed earlier, Nietzsche avowed that two of the goals of the *becoming* are the recognition and mastery of "reality itself," as he called it. These appear to be relatively simple and straightforward goals. But what can be done when "reality itself" must now be called into question? Or worse, what if there is no longer a reality – only a hyperreality – a simulation altogether? Where does the real end and the simulation begin? Or vice versa? Perhaps these questions were nonexistent when Nietzsche was living, but in the worlds of *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*, they certainly muddy the waters of existence.

Jean Baudrillard contended that life is no longer lived in a state of reality, reality understood to mean an objective set of necessary circumstances and events. Instead,

Baudrillard claimed that life is now lived in a state of perpetual simulation; he called life in this simulacrum a state of *hyperreality*.

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are . . . ours. *The desert of the real itself*. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1).

According to Baudrillard, the realm of existence that is occupied today is no longer what is *real*, as defined above, but what is instead *anticipated to be real*. This is the nature of society in the age of ever-present mass media; there are now expectations and examples of what life is like and how it should be lived that are received and processed before reality has its chance to catch up and unfold. This is what Baudrillard meant by *precession of simulacra*, which thus renders the real obsolete.

This concept of "models of a real without origin or reality" is especially relevant to the concerns in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. In *Blade Runner*, there are the replicants. Not human, they are modeled to be *more* than human, yet they lack any personal history or place in the society that their presence has turned upside down. Humanity, and the human identity, have ceased to exist and function because these synthetic beings, these *simulated* humans, have superseded these concepts. What *is*

humanity now? Humans are manufacturing it themselves, and yet the technologically superior replicants lack identity as well, as they are loaded with false memories and have no families or place of origin – no referent – to fall back on. In *Fight Club*, The Narrator bases his life around what the messages and instructions he receives from the consumer and entertainment industries tell him he *should* be doing, like being trapped in a job that is disconnecting him from himself and assembling a catalogue-precise yet sterile, lifeless, and functionally bankrupt apartment. In *Miami Vice*, Crockett and Tubbs gain access and respect in the underworld by out-villainizing the villains, as seen in their first meeting with Jose Yero. Their fabricated criminal identities, and their skill at enacting them, make them simulated über-criminals, in a sense. Their simulated criminality thus becomes more "real" than the actual criminality of the actual criminals, who then accept Crockett and Tubbs (or, actually, Burnett and Cooper) as actual criminals. Later, Crockett's simulated criminal identity begins to become more "real" to him than his actual identity – to the extent that he begins to question his commitment to his actual identity. In each case, the real is superseded and replaced by the hyperreal.

The other key aspect of hyperreality is the simulated identities – the doppelgangers – that the protagonists must *overcome*. In each film, there is the stratification between the protagonists and their doppelgangers; there is forever a sense of a stronger and superior identity to be achieved, but at great cost to the protagonists. Of course, this is what Nietzsche intended the *becoming* to be, but when it is seen in practice, the harshness of its severity and the resulting trauma become frighteningly real. In *Blade Runner*, Deckard is forced back into service to eliminate Batty, the superior replicant. The very presence of these replicants has turned *Blade Runner*'s world into one in which

life is no longer special and sacred and given by greater forces than ourselves, but is manufactured and mass-produced and commoditized. Human identity has been irretrievably lost when it is made and implanted instead of naturally conceived and developed across a lifetime. Later, we witness Deckard fight to the death with Batty, who nearly kills him. In *Fight Club*, The Narrator is nearly led to his demise by Tyler, whom he too must battle to the death to regain control of his identity and reality. And in *Miami Vice*, Crockett and Tubbs must maintain an uneasy balance between their actual identities as police serving and protecting the public and their simulated identities as criminals engaged in drug smuggling and violence, all the while feeling the pressure that at any moment one identity could invade the other and destroy both in the process. The simulated doppelganger identities loom large over the protagonists, forever beckoning the furthering of the *becoming*, while at the same time always threatening them with annihilation. About the doubling of a primary identity with a doppelganger, Baudrillard wrote:

> Of all the prostheses that mark the history of the body, the double is doubtless the oldest. But the double is precisely not a prosthesis: it is an imaginary figure, which, just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like his other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death. This is not always the case, however: when the double materializes, when it becomes visible, it signifies imminent death. In other words, the imaginary power and wealth of the double – the one in which the strangeness and at the same time the

> intimacy of the subject to itself are played out . . . rests in its immateriality, on the fact that it is and remains a phantasm. Everyone can dream, and must have dreamed his whole life, of a perfect duplication or multiplication of his being, but such copies only have the power of dreams, and are destroyed when one attempts to force the dream into the real. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 95)

These doubles, then, initially serve as a lens through which the subject can view both the known and (previously) unknown about itself. This doubling produces a haunting effect through the sense that the double is now a kind of competition for the subject; it is a figure against whom the subject must now measure itself and indeed measure up to. But in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*, it is always the double that has the advantage, as it is the double that is always stronger, superior, tougher, or more dangerous. The primary identity may have come first, but it is now stratified beneath the double in the critical Nietzschean factors stated above. But, as Baudrillard emphasizes, the double must always remain in the realm of the imaginary. The subject and the double cannot coexist – there is space enough for but one unified identity, and a self divided against itself cannot stand. Thus, as Nietzsche charges, he who seeks to *become* must master himself.

In each of the three films being analyzed, we see our protagonists haunted by their doubles. Deckard, and the rest of his society, are left confused and without identity by the rise of the replicants. These humans have created their own superiors, and are now threatened with perhaps being made obsolete by them. The Narrator creates Tyler, who materializes as The Narrator's runaway id; eventually, Tyler attempts to fill The

Narrator's lack of identity entirely with his own. In *Miami Vice*, Crockett and Tubbs enact their criminal alter egos Burnett and Cooper, and both find their actual identities encroached upon by the consequences of the actions of these simulated identities.

What makes the cases of these protagonists unique and dangerous is the fact that in each of their lives, their doubles *have* become realized, and the resulting confrontations with these doubles represent the key driving force in the *becoming* of the protagonists. As Baudrillard emphasizes, there is an "imminent death" when the double becomes real; in the films, the protagonists must either *overcome* their doubles (either literally, figuratively, or both) or surrender their identities. It is through these confrontations that the protagonists learn to master themselves, which furthers their *becoming*. Mastery of one's self must come before mastery of reality, for without self-mastery and unification of identity, one cannot find the inner strength and relentlessness for that next phase of the *becoming*. Again, a self divided against itself cannot stand.

It is notable that *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* all possess the dimension of the double – the simulated identity – being realized. Baudrillard wrote about the double in entirely imaginary terms; the double was solely the creation of he who imagined it. But in the worlds of the films, these doubles have, in their own distinctive manners, been realized. In Deckard's case, his "evil double" is a manufactured human simulation whose creation he has nothing to do with. Although the two initially share no history or relationship, it becomes clear as *Blade Runner* progresses that they are on the same emotional and philosophical wavelength; they share the same morbid sadness, and it is that aggregate sameness that furthers the ultimate movement in Deckard's *becoming*. In *Fight Club*, Tyler originates as a figment of The Narrator's

imagination, a projection of The Narrator's id in response to his dissatisfaction with his perceived emasculation and disconnection. But this is only the beginning; Tyler eventually begins to take control of The Narrator, whose self splits and becomes two identities autonomously and alternately in control of the same body. It is the relationship between these two identities – supportive at first, eventually adversarial – that is the driving force of The Narrator's *becoming*. And in *Miami Vice*, Crockett and Tubbs function just as efficiently as criminals as they do as cops – perhaps even more so, as they actually accomplish more as simulated criminals than they ultimately do as real/realtime cops. Crockett even comes to find that the lines between his true identity and his simulated one are fluid at best. At a critical moment, it is through his simulated identity that he sees an avenue to a content and satisfying future, and he even goes so far as to attempt to pursue it. Baudrillard deals with the self and the double in imaginary terms only; *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* deal with these concepts on the next level – a level on which both the self and the double have been realized.

The most critical aspect of examining these two lenses and viewing the films through them is to understand that Baudrillard's ideas about simulation, simulacra, and simulated identities are the key factors in the *becoming* of the protagonists. Not only are Baudrillard's aforementioned ideas essential within the films to construct the necessary settings for the *becoming* to occur, but they also represent the most challenging obstacles for the protagonists to *overcome* and master. Each film has its own distinctive vision of the *overcoming* and the *becoming* involving elements of simulation, but it is precisely these dynamics that give *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* a common theme: living a simulated identity, or living in a simulated reality – or doing both simultaneously

– must be *overcome* and mastered if one is to live a full and meaningful life to the furthest extent of its potential.

III.

Blade Runner

Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi film is a triumph of both style and substance; as it dazzles the eyes with its looming, glowing, futuristic cityscape, it also asks questions about the nature of humanity and existence – questions with no easy or clear-cut answers. In its congested and polluted urban jungle, in which gargantuan electronic billboards ubiquitously beckon the denizens with all manner of products and services, the humans of this world are faced with the loss of nothing less than their collective identity. This is due to the realization of a technology that has given rise to a new paradigm of existence – the *replicants*, as they are called. This new race, publicized as "more human than human" by their makers, is not simply a race of human replicas. They actually represent a more advanced human model. The replicants are superior in strength, speed, stamina, and function to the humans upon which their design was based. But there's a catch – they only live for four years, at the most. They don't know that, but some have begun to realize that something about them is not quite as it should be, and this awareness has put them in quite a desperate situation. A small group of them have escaped from their off-world labor camp (as labor is the primary use most were designed for) and come to earth looking for answers. Like their human counterparts, they "want more life," and the knowledge of who and what they are to make that life meaningful.

Dragged into these circumstances is Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), who once worked as a Blade Runner, or a police-sponsored bounty hunter whose trade is the

tracking and "retiring" (murdering) of replicants who have gone renegade. Deckard wants no part of his old career, but he soon finds that he has no choice. He grudgingly sets out on his task, but things get complicated for him when he begins to learn about and understand one replicant in particular, and Deckard soon finds long-dormant emotions and desires awakened in him. He is also eventually awakened to new understanding, at the same time as he is forced to ask new questions, the most terrifying of which concerns his own identity and the nature of his own existence.

The world of *Blade Runner* is precisely the kind of simulacra that Baudrillard describes. First, there is the film's vision of the future Los Angeles. It is a place in which everything is mass-manufactured and mass-producible, as evidenced by the ever-present marketing, advertising, and commerce. Giuliana Bruno, quoting Baudrillard in her essay "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*," comments on this:

> . . . Jean Baudrillard speaks of a twist in the relationship between the real and its reproduction [when] . . . the process of reproducibility is pushed to the limit. As a result [of this], "the real is not what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced . . . the hyperreal . . . which is entirely in simulation."[7] The narrative space of *Blade Runner* participates in this logic: "All of Los Angeles . . . is of the order of hyperreal and simulation."[8] There, the machinery of imitations, reproductions, and seriality, in other words, "replicants," affirms the fiction of the real. (67)

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[7] *Simulations* 146.
[8] *Ibid*. 25.

Here in *Blade Runner* we see Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality realized. *Blade Runner*'s world is one in which what was once real has become lost; in a world in which technology can reproduce and mass-produce a synthetic, artificial copy of everything, the real is superseded by and replaced with imitations and simulations. These copies take the place of what they initially imitated – they become "more real than real," because it is they that are mass-produced, proliferated, and eventually omnipresent. The real then becomes obsolete, as the real, with its natural occurrence and uniqueness, cannot compete with its ubiquitous simulation, mass-proliferated by the technology and machinery that created it.

It is, though, the presence of the replicants that creates the ultimate simulacra; because of said presence, it is not merely the external reality or one's setting that is simulated, but existence itself. If humankind is now capable of not just perfectly manufacturing and replicating its collective self, but indeed surpassing itself through these processes, than who and what are *real*? What distinction does said concept have any longer? Bruno writes:

> Replicants are the perfect simulacra – a convergence of genetics and linguistics, the genetic miniaturization enacting the dimension of simulation. Baudrillard describes the simulacrum as "an operational double . . . [a] programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes."[9] It would be difficult to find a better definition of the nature and functions of the

[9] *Ibid.* 4.

> replicants and their capacity of simulation in the narrative motivation of *Blade Runner*. In L.A., year 2019, simulation is completely dominant as the effect of the existence and operations of the replicant/simulacrum. "The unreal is no longer that of dream or of fantasy or a beyond or a within, it is that of *hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself*."[10] The replicant performs such hallucinatory resemblance. (68)

The world of *Blade Runner* is so completely simulated and hyperreal that even humanity itself is now designed, mass-produced, marketed, and reproduced. Humanity – life itself – is just another creatable, marketable commodity. The essence of being human, of being a unique individual whose cause and reasons for living are just as unique and singularly extraordinary, has been superseded. It no longer possesses any utility, as technology has "improved" upon it and rendered it obsolete. Bruno discusses this dissolution:

> "It" looks and acts like a he or a she. Perfect simulation is thus its goal, and Rachael manages to reach it. To simulate, in fact, is a more complex act than to imitate or to feign. To simulate implies actual producing in oneself some of the characteristics of what one wants to simulate. It is a matter of internalizing the signs or the symptoms to the point where there is no difference between "false" and "true," "real" and "imaginary." With Rachael the system has reached perfection. She is the most perfect replicant because she does not know whether she is one or not. To say

[10] *Ibid*. 142.

> that she simulates her symptoms, her sexuality, her memory, is to say that she realizes, experiences them. (68)

So the superseding of humanity is complete. There is nothing left to achieve or perfect. As the audience comes to find out, there may even be a more perfect replicant than Rachael (Sean Young) – Deckard. It is strongly implied that Deckard is a replicant himself, beginning with the reflection of his eyes. They shine the way the other replicants' eyes do when struck by light a certain way. There is also his dream of a unicorn; the title of Philip K. Dick's novel upon which *Blade Runner* is based is *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Further adding importance to this dream is Gaff's (Edward James Olmos) "gift" of the origami unicorn at the film's close. Unless Deckard is a replicant, how would Gaff – also a Blade Runner – know what Deckard is dreaming? And since he does know what Deckard is dreaming, could it be because Gaff is a replicant as well? Not only does Deckard not know if he is a replicant or not, there is no one to answer that question for him, unlike the other replicants. Deckard cannot question his maker the way Batty (Rutger Hauer), the lethal "combat model" and leader of the renegade replicants can. He cannot have his nature disclosed or confirmed the way Rachael can. Just like the rest of (what was) real humankind, Deckard is truly all alone, without knowledge of his creator or the nature of his existence, without answers, and without any given external purpose. It is thus Deckard, not Rachael, who may in fact be the most perfect human simulation. He does not know for sure if he is a replicant, and neither, it seems, does anyone else.

So if Deckard is to initiate the Nietzschean journey of the *becoming*, he has much to *overcome* if he is to *become*. He lives in a complete simulacrum, and must learn to cope with the uncertainty of who and what he is and how he can reconcile himself to and master his reality (or hyperreality, in his case). At the beginning of *Blade Runner*, Deckard fits a common film noir archetype, that of the gruff, dour loner. Deckard is the classic reluctant hero, burned out by his years of murderous, soul-deadening work – work that we get the sense that he once believed in (he must have to have gotten so good at it), but has come to resent for the toll it has taken on him. Deckard seems lost; he is portrayed as jaded, disconnected, and depressed. He does not appear to have any friends or social community. Most of all, he seems tired and lacking the will to truly *live*, not just exist from day to day. Combined with the aforementioned dynamics above, these more basic and internal circumstances and factors are what Deckard must *overcome* if he is to reconnect with himself and regain the strength and toughness he needs to continue to *become*.

In contrast to Deckard is Roy Batty, the leader of the renegade replicants and Deckard's doppelganger. Both men suffer the same pains – lack of knowledge and security about the natures of their identity and existence, the soul-deadening toll of their labors, their dissatisfaction with their circumstances and their subsequent inability to reconcile themselves to and master their reality. But unlike Deckard, Batty refuses to languish in inertia and depression because of the circumstances of his reality. Batty aims to do something – whatever he can – about it. Like Deckard, Batty is a murderer too. But unlike the murders Deckard commits for his job, which reflect his jaded dissociation

and institutionalized impersonality, Batty's murders are raw and impulsive, emotional and purposeful. They are also, in Batty's mind, righteous. In his article "*Blade Runner* and Cyberpunk Visions of Humanity," W.A. Senior writes:

> . . . the situations, behaviors, reactions, and needs of the replicants parallel or exceed in intensity those of the few humans[11] in the film . . . because they are so aware of their [four year] existence, the replicants live with an intensity and joie de vivre that the genetic humans lack almost entirely. Both of the police, Gaff and Bryant, seem to be cold . . . [they are] highly pragmatic and dissociated men. Tyrell, the Frankensteinian father of the replicants destroyed by his own triumph, is a caricature of the inhuman scientist obsessed with progress. (7)

In this sense that Senior is describing, the replicants live up to their billing as "more human than human." It is this passion, this internal fire that Senior writes of, that Deckard must reconnect with to jumpstart and sustain his *becoming*. He must re-engage with his reality and recapture his will to learn and grow and understand. Only then can he master himself, his emotions, and his reality. Deckard takes the first step towards doing this when Batty, his double, takes his first step towards his own *becoming*. Batty escapes to earth to find answers and prolong his life, which forces Deckard to return to action as a Blade Runner. It isn't what Deckard is looking for, but as he and the audience will learn, it is this first step of re-engaging reality that will lead to Deckard facing the

[11] It is never firmly established whether or not Deckard and Gaff are indeed replicants, which Senior acknowledges and comments upon elsewhere in this essay. Because they are on the side of the humans and behave as the other humans do, Deckard and Gaff can be grouped with the humans in this context.

challenges and obstacles that he must *overcome*. This is the gateway to Deckard's journey – his *becoming*.

This passion for the journey is also aided by Rachael, with whom Deckard falls in love in spite of himself. She helps him reconnect with himself through his capacity to connect with her; Deckard cannot help but empathize with Rachael, as in her he finds both a companion as well as someone whose plight he can identify with. At first, Deckard takes his own depression and frustration out on Rachael, as he coldly and somewhat cruelly disillusions her about her true nature. Deckard knew that Rachael was a replicant, but she didn't; as she desperately attempts to "prove" her humanity and hold on to the family and the memories she believes are hers, Deckard cannot bear her innocence and her ignorance to the deception perpetrated against her in the face of his own depression and disillusionment about these same things. He needs to make Rachael and himself *equal*, the *same*. After he does, and he watches as Rachael is reduced to the same losses of identity and reality as he struggles with, his feelings for her begin to grow. Ironically, although appropriately given his anger and frustration, Deckard's disillusioning assault on Rachael is his way of reaching out to her. He has been forced back into a job that he doesn't want to do, and he is feeling the pains of dehumanization and amorality that go with the territory. Deckard is a sad and lonely man who needs someone to empathize with; Rachael gives him something to fight for, something to tell him that it isn't all meaningless and for nothing. Perhaps most of all, she is tangible evidence to him that he's *not* alone, that he isn't the only one who is contending with these issues of identity and displacement in one's own reality. If Deckard can save

Rachael, if he can save just one, perhaps it will make up for all the replicants he has "retired."

As Batty is Deckard's doppelganger, his "evil double," his journey mirrors Deckard's in an inverted and perverse way. While the journeys of both Deckard and Batty involve their reclaiming of a sense of identity and mastering their reality by finding and accepting their places in it, Batty's journey takes a course that is simultaneously the same and opposite to Deckard's, which affirms its mirroring nature. Whereas Deckard returns, against his will, to a job he has come to hate, Batty's journey begins as he escapes from slavery, which he has always hated. Deckard is *forced back into* his function by his superiors; Batty defies his masters by *escaping* his function. Since Deckard and Batty are the film's main characters and are inextricably linked, there are clear parallels in the nature of their respective journeys, and thus their *becoming*. In his *Senses of Cinema* essay "Dreams of Postmodernism and Thoughts of Mortality: A Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective of *Blade Runner*," David C. Ryan writes:

> History teaches us that fascist cultures favour binaries over pluralities. Deckard's moral choice to be a killer rather than a victim is but one example among many of how these characters are caught between extreme positions. His dilemma is that he either faces his own execution or be killed pursuing these fugitives. Deckard's protagonism is based not so much on classical definitions of valour but on his struggle for survival. Under these circumstances, the film portrays Deckard in varying states of agency and passivity. His agency is revealed in his physical actions: his

> investigation, interrogations, executions and his eventual rescue of Rachael. (http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/07/43/blade-runner.html)

Here we see a very succinct description of a key dynamic that Deckard must *overcome*. He must either succeed as a killer or die as a victim. Since death is the ultimate defeat, Deckard has no choice but to be the very best as a Blade Runner – which, we find out right from the beginning – he is. Because of his circumstances, Deckard cannot be called "good" or "right" in the traditional moral senses of these words. But the *becoming* is not about such noble etherealities, it is about the struggle to survive and the mastering of one's self and one's reality. Deckard, then, is doing the best he can given the situation he inherits; by returning to service as a Blade Runner, he has fully embarked on the next phase of his *becoming*. Initiative is vital to the *becoming*, and Deckard shows no lack of it once he accepts the nature of his reality in the fascist state he dwells in.

For Batty, once again, the journey is the same but inverted. Whereas Deckard's aim is to end life, Batty's is to prolong it. Confused about the nature and purpose of his life and depressed and angry about its circumstances, Batty can only desperately grasp for more of it. More of it so that he can learn, understand, experience – so that he can *live*, in the fullest sense of the word. Ryan continues:

> A modern audience might admire Batty's will to flee the confinements of slavery and perhaps sympathize with his existential struggle to live. Initially, however, his desire to live is subsumed by his desire for power to

> extend his life. Why? In Heidegger's[12] view, because death inevitably limits the number if choices we have, freedom is earned by properly concentrating on death. Thoughts of mortality give us a motive for taking life seriously. Batty's status as a slave identifies him as an object, but his *will to power* casts him as an agent and subject in the Nietzschean sense.[13] His physical and psychological courage to rebel is developed as an ethical principle in which he revolts against a social order that has conspired against him at the genetic, cultural, and political levels. In Heidegger's view, Batty's willingness to defy social conformity allows for him to authentically pursue the meaning of his existence beyond his programming as a soldier. Confronting his makers becomes part of his quest, but killing them marks his failure to transcend his own nature.

Like Deckard, Batty must either succeed as a killer or die as a victim. But just as Deckard can't be seen as a traditional hero because of the nature of his circumstances and reality, neither can Batty be called a traditional villain. Deckard and Batty live in the same reality, with the same circumstances, and each must *overcome* these circumstances and master their reality. Once again like Deckard, Batty has the power of initiative on his side, as he engineers his escape from slavery and begins his quest to extend his life. But the perversion of Batty's journey is apparent; unlike Deckard, Batty is not compelled to kill under the threat of execution. He kills out of anger and frustration, and partly

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[12] *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harper & Row, 1962. (reference mine)
[13] *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marianne Cowan, Chicago, Gateway Editions, 1955. (reference mine)

because it is hard-wired into his essence to do so. Batty has hit a snag in his *becoming*; he is still enslaved by his programming, which comes not from *who* he is, but from *what* he is. Batty has *overcome* his physical slavery and subjugation, but not his mental, and indeed emotional, slavery and subjugation.

So tied together are the journeys of Deckard and Batty that it is inevitable – essential – that their journeys will intersect. Deckard pursues Batty, and the two eventually square off in a battle to the death. During this sequence, Batty is very much characterized as Deckard's double, as Senior describes:

> . . . their wounds are replicas of one another in this scene: both have bleeding faces; both have injured hands. As Deckard braces himself to put fingers that Batty has dislocated back into their sockets, Batty pierces his hand with a nail to keep it from clenching itself as his life's battery begins to drain. (8)

Batty has realized and accepted that he cannot prolong his life. Deckard has killed all of Batty's friends and, most heart-breakingly, his "lover" Pris (Daryl Hannah), so Batty no longer has anything left to lose. Deckard, on the other hand, has everything to lose – his life, the freedom he can attain if he finishes his job by killing Batty, and of course Rachael, with whom by this time it is undeniable that he has fallen in love. But Batty, the advanced, superior, technologically-engineered killing machine, defeats Deckard. As Batty's eyes gleam with menace as Deckard hangs off of a rooftop, suddenly Batty's expression softens, and a most interesting thing happens. Ryan describes:

> . . . as he watches Deckard struggle for his life, Batty decides to spare Deckard in one final act of mercy. Then, he humbly recounts and illustrates some brief "moments' from his life, imagistic references to his life as a slave and his experiences in space. We assume, of course, that these memories are real. As Batty accepts his deliverance through death, he releases a Dove, an act that symbolizes his transcendence.

In the moments before his death, Batty achieves the transcendence that had eluded him. He *overcomes* his programming, his supposedly predetermined nature, and is able to *become* in these final moments as he realizes that life is *qualitative*, not quantitative. Batty realizes, as he meditates on how truly extraordinary his short life has been, that life is precious and to be lived and loved – *all* life, not just his own. Like Deckard, he becomes a rescuer, and *overcomes* his programming as a killer. Batty's death ends his journey, but eventually the journey is, in the end, one he lived and experienced fully. Batty gives his life the autonomous meaning and purpose he so desired it to have in his last act by saving Deckard, and in doing so, he redeems himself. At his life's end, he does indeed master himself and his reality; he proves that he is more than just the sum of his parts and his programming, and that a synthetic body and a four-year lifespan do not preclude and act of love and truly human compassion.

Given the doubling dynamic between Deckard and Batty, it is critical that Batty, in his life's last and perhaps only meaningful and heroic act, helps to further Deckard's *becoming*. While Batty's "job" was the dead-end of enslavement, Deckard's has given him (Deckard) a possible avenue to freedom, and Rachael has given Deckard something

to make that freedom worthwhile and meaningful. But Deckard still has a lesson to learn, and, poetically, he must learn it at the hands of his doppelganger Batty. Ryan explains:

> With his life spared, Deckard gains further insight to the moral condition of these slaves, an insight that transports him from his isolation to his communion with Rachael. Initially, the film treats the natural and artificial as contraries, but the film moves beyond this binary by having the human Deckard escape this environment with Rachael . . . Although Deckard's growing concern and loyalty to her re-energizes his passion for life, their relationship illustrates the interrelation of the natural and artificial.

As *Blade Runner* ends, it becomes clear just how far Deckard has come and how much he has *overcome*. He reconnects with his humanity through his connections with Rachael and Batty, as the emotionality of Rachael's love and Batty's mercy reawaken his own emotions. He finds, as Batty does, that one's nature and behavior cannot be simulated or predetermined. Deckard's identity is not determined externally by his job or by who his creator is, nor is it negated by the presence of the replicants and the nature of their existence. Identity comes from learning about who one truly is, and this is a key component of the *becoming*. Deckard has mastered himself and his reality through his subjection to the challenges and obstacles that came from both within himself and without; it is through this subjection that he has gained the experience and subsequent knowledge of himself and the replicants that made the furthering of the *becoming* possible. He has realized that the authentic and the synthetic, the true and the simulated,

the real and the hyperreal, are all reduced to irrelevance in the face of the real love that he and Rachael feel for each other, and the love of life that compelled Batty to spare his. And he has come to understand that life, humanity, and emotion are not bound by biology or nature or engineering, but by empathy and compassion and reverence for life. This, Deckard realizes, is truly where human identity is found; because he has reclaimed this identity both for himself and for Rachael, he is no longer disconnected from himself and everyone else. He certainly has come a long way from referring to replicants as "it," as he does earlier in the film.

Perhaps humanity can be narrowly defined in a scientific sense, but true humanity – the humanity whose essence is love – is not determined by what one is composed of or who one *is*, but by what one *does*. Not *being*, but *becoming*. As Nietzsche taught, life is experienced most fully and to the furthest extent of its all-encompassing value when we are in a perpetual state of flux, of constantly learning, growing, and adapting. These things can't be done if one is complacently accepting the circumstances of one's reality and allowing one's self to be led and determined by them. Both Deckard and Batty take the initiative in their lives and thus take control of their own *becoming*. In doing so, they further not only their own *becoming*, but each other's as well. Ryan ultimately assesses *Blade Runner* in this sense:

> How does one transcend social determinism? The film argues that transformation involves personal redemption, and redemption lies in not eliminating your enemies but altering them by acts of mercy and, perhaps, developing an empathetic understanding for them. For instance,

> Deckard's transformation from an executioner to the moral agent who rescues Rachael occurs because of two remarkable and unexpected acts of empathy: Batty spares Deckard's life and Gaff spares Rachael's. Although Batty spends the majority of the film trying to find answers to extend his life, he realizes by the film's end that the future is closed to him and that he cannot live beyond his purpose. Although he has murdered many people, Batty redeems himself by accepting his mortality and by sparing his executioner; at the moment he saves Deckard, perhaps for the first time in the film, Batty sees a world that exists outside of his own needs.

Thus, Batty too transforms from an executioner to a moral agent who rescues – Deckard, in his case. And Deckard, who has spent the majority of the film executing replicants, becomes a savior as well; directly in Rachael's case, circumstantially in Batty's. The questions that Deckard had about the nature of the replicants' existence and life have been answered by Rachael's capacity to love and be loved and Batty's capacity to empathize and care. Finding these qualities in others – in *replicants*, the "it", no less – allows Deckard to reconnect with these long-lost qualities in himself. With true connections to the essence of humanity established, his identity reclaimed, and his reality understood and *overcome*, Deckard is able to reconcile with himself and his reality. He has thus reached a new and further phase in his *becoming*.

IV.

Fight Club

In 1999, David Fincher's *Fight Club* confronted the corporate and consumer cultures of 21st century America. Through brutal violence and anti-establishment stand-offishness, the film dealt with these topics bluntly and courageously, and in an offbeat and stylish manner. As in *Blade Runner*, the film's narrative concerns the journey of a dehumanized and disconnected protagonist into an empowered and self-determining individual. But just like Rick Deckard, this protagonist must face down and *overcome* many challenges and obstacles. As he does this throughout the course of *Fight Club*'s narrative, he learns important insights about how and from where a person forms an identity, and what constitutes a real and meaningful existence.

More so than *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*'s world closely approximates our own; its creators clearly examined the state of modern American culture and its fixations on conspicuous consumption and upward corporate mobility and the effects these practices have on peoples' abilities to identify and connect with each other. The film's makers looked at these things and took them to a possible (though dystopic) logical extreme. In *Fight Club*'s world, the exhausting exertions made in pursuit of decadent consumerism and corporate advancement have reduced people to obedient labor drones who have become incapable of even understanding and responding to their own feelings any longer. Because they have become so programmed to anticipate that the answer to everything is to either work more or acquire more, they can't even process or understand feelings that don't correspond to either of these two pursuits. If one can no longer even understand or

identify with one's self, then forming relationships with others becomes almost insurmountably difficult.

When we first meet the main character (Edward Norton), who is known only as The Narrator throughout the film, he has a gun in his mouth. He tells us of the apocalyptic event he is about to participate in, against his will, and then begins to relate how he ended up where we meet him. He was once just a run-of-the-mill corporate office worker, faceless and anonymous, with a job that concerned constant flying all over the country to analyze mechanical failures in automobile wrecks and determine if their causes warranted a recall. The Narrator finds this work numbing and depressing, and is shown to have no friends or social life, just like Rick Deckard at the beginning of *Blade Runner*. He is living a life that he doesn't feel is his own. The Narrator feels trapped inside a kind of hamster's wheel; he senses that he is an unwilling participant in a never-ending simulacrum of analyzing, traveling, and filling out paperwork. The draining and restrictive nature of his career cuts him off from himself and those around him, and leaves him jaded and socially impotent. There simply isn't in him the energy or the *joie de vivre* to reach out and try to make a real human connection, and he doesn't seem to feel as though he would know how to do this anyway.

To fill his time and the social void in his life, The Narrator spends most of his time obsessively stocking and decorating his apartment with the latest in chic, expensive furniture and clever modern art. In what is perhaps the ultimate realization of the concept of pathetic, The Narrator substitutes these possessions for relationships. But he seems to realize that the apartment, this presumed "refuge" from his career, is merely another

simulacrum, purely for show and formulated by the corporate retailers who've convinced him that it's what an ideal apartment should look like. Beyond his job, the apartment further serves to disconnect The Narrator from himself and others. Like the rest of his existence, there is none of The Narrator in his apartment; it's purely a corporately-designed exercise by the people at IKEA and the other various retailers whose products it consists of. Far from being a refuge, the apartment is yet another prison that seals The Narrator off from the rest of the world.

The Narrator seems to be most troubled with his insomnia, which he seeks relief for in the form of prescription sleep drugs. His skeptical physician refuses his request and dismisses The Narrator's pleas for sympathy, making an offhand remark about cancer patients and others suffering from debilitating and terminal illnesses being the ones in "real pain." On a lark, The Narrator attends a testicular cancer support group. He is overcome by the honesty and free-flowing emotion of the support group members, which he experiences through the immediacy brought on by the pain, loss, and possibly terminal nature of their illness. Even though he reveals almost nothing about himself, The Narrator is able to find a release in the circumstances of those less fortunate than he (The Narrator still has his health, after all). In this atmosphere of nonjudgment and emotional support, he finally finds the relief and human connection he needs, even though he is lying to the support group members about his health status and who he is. His insomnia subsides, and he becomes "addicted" to the rush and urgency of the real emotions and openness he experiences, so much so that he begins to attend many support groups for a variety of illnesses that he doesn't have. Even though he either doesn't

realize it or doesn't care, The Narrator is merely trading one simulacrum for another; his status as a liar and an imposter render him just a spectator of the entire support group experience. He still does not exist as a functioning and participating member in any real human relationship, and he is no more connected to or essential to the support groups than he is to his job in any real way.

Nevertheless, the support groups become a kind of surrogate social life for The Narrator, and he is content until another faker – another support group "tourist" like himself – named Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter) shows up at the same support groups, doing the same thing he is doing. With the illusion of realness and the pretense of honesty shattered, The Narrator loses his emotional outlet and simulated human connection. With his insomnia and depression returned and his anger growing, he resolves to confront Marla and tell her to leave "his" support groups so that he can return to his blissful simulacra. She refuses, so they agree to go to separate groups and avoid each other. Even though Marla is the only person present at the support groups with whom his relationship is real and not based on deception (acrimonious though it may be, but only because The Narrator chooses to make it so), The Narrator instead opts for the simulacrum and sends her away.

Soon after, The Narrator meets Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), a traveling soap salesman with an oddball demeanor and sense of humor, while returning home on an airplane from one of his many trips. The Narrator is taken with Tyler's blunt honesty and snarky observations, and senses that he and Tyler are on the same philosophical wavelength. When The Narrator returns to his apartment that night, he finds that there

has been an explosion, and that everything he cares about (namely, his prized furniture and frou-frou knick-knacks) has been blown to pieces. With his "refuge" destroyed, and after he briefly considers going to Marla, The Narrator instead turns to Tyler. After the two drink and talk at a bar, Tyler offers to let The Narrator move in with him, on one condition – Tyler wants The Narrator to hit him, "as hard as you can," he tells The Narrator. The Narrator is at first mystified, but sensing the opportunity for that elusive human connection he so desperately craves, he eventually agrees. The two find that they enjoy the visceral rush and spontaneous chaos that the street-fighting entails. Finally, The Narrator has found something real, something completely unsimulated that he can experience without rules, structure, or boundaries. There is something intoxicating about the danger and taboo nature of beating and being beaten; unlike the rest of The Narrator's safe and boringly regimented life, there is a test inherent in the fighting. Can he handle this? Will he survive this? Will the pain be too much? This is scary, risky adversity that The Narrator has never subjected himself to before, and he enjoys discovering that he can face and *overcome* what he never would have imagined himself capable of. The Narrator may have lost the confining safety of his apartment, but he soon learns that he never needed it, and that he can survive and *overcome* much more painful and frightening things.

Tyler and The Narrator soon find that they are not alone, as spectators to their parking-lot brawls begin to ask if they can join in. Apparently, The Narrator is not the only one looking for a way to face and *overcome* what he fears, in their cases a fight and a good beating. These men feel restricted and emasculated by the society whose jobs turn

them into depersonalized, nondescript cogs in a giant machine. They feel dissatisfied and disillusioned with a bankrupt and meaningless consumer culture that tells them that the answer to every problem is to spend more and acquire more. Such are the devices and mechanisms of simulacra – substituting empty signs and signifiers for the real that obscure, not describe or relate to, what is true and real. For The Narrator and the others, the best rebellion is to do – and overdo – what you're told you can't or shouldn't do, because you might "get hurt" or because it's not proper or polite. These are lies told by the system to keep people in line, to keep them productive for the services and ends of the system, and to keep them from discovering how strong and tough they truly are. If the labor drones were to learn their true strength, then rebellion against the system would certainly follow. The fights fulfill this function of rebellion, as they serve no purpose within the simulacrum, and thus work against it by the very nature and presence of their realness. The realness of the fights – the connection to the real that they manifest – is a factor through which the unreality, the *hyperreality*, of the simulacra can be *overcome*.

Fight Club is thus born, and Tyler eventually morphs what was once a self-contained social community into a mobilized terror organization called Project Mayhem. This secret society's purpose is to take violent revenge on the consumer culture that marginalizes its members by selling them into corporate slavery so that they can earn the necessary money to buy the frivolities and status symbols that perpetuate this vicious circle. *Fight Club*'s central characters endeavor to bring down this consumerism-driven society and economy and return to a more primal, functional existence. This reality would be one based on having real, visceral experiences and would be free from the

illusory distractions of money and its manufactured status symbols and emphases on consumption and acquisition. Late in the film, Tyler finally explains his master plan to The Narrator, and his vision of a new reality:

> In the world I see, you're stalking elk through the damp canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center. You'll wear leather clothes that will last you the rest of your life. You'll climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower, and when you look down, you'll see tiny figures pounding corn, laying strips of venison on the empty carpool lane of some abandoned superhighway . . .

We come to learn that the apocalyptic event that's about to occur when the film begins is the simultaneous destruction of all of the nation's credit card company headquarters, thus creating financial chaos and resetting the economy to absolute zero. Following this, Tyler seeks to return society to the more basic and operative reality that he describes above, in which self-reliance and active participation in one's means of living and survival will be the most vital factors. The supreme goal is thus manifestly Nietzschean – a life lived with the constant striving for increased self-awareness and self-reliance, free of the distractions of consumerism and self-doubt. Under Tyler's new world order, hyperreality would be brought down and replaced with an anarchic neo-primitive society, unmistakable in its clear and simple realness. Its denizens would be the masters of this reality as opposed to its subjects, as they were in the world of the hyperreal, and the mastery of one's reality is the ultimate imperative of the Nietzschean journey.

Simulation is an important aspect of The Narrator's world and existence. During our introduction to him, as he describes the nature of life on the road for his job, he speaks disparagingly about the fragmentation of life into "single-serving" portions. The hotel toothpaste, mouthwash, soap – even cotton swabs are individually wrapped. The Narrator even describes the people he meets in these terms – "single-serving friends," he calls them. He tells us, "In between takeoff and landing, we have our time together, but that's all we get." Every day for The Narrator is a repetition of the same, until eventually he says that everything begins to feel like "a copy of a copy of a copy." This element of infinite reproducibility is vital to the process of simulation and its eventual propagation and dominance. As Baudrillard explained in *Simulations*, "the real is not what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced . . . the hyperreal . . . which is entirely in simulation" (146). The Narrator no longer lives in a state of reality, but one of *hyperreality* – a state in which simulation, reinforced through endless reproduction, supersedes reality. The Narrator no longer has any sense of what *real* human connections and relationships are, if he ever did at all. All he knows are the single-serving fragments of brief introductions and trivial banter that life on the road is filled with.

Even when The Narrator is home and away from his job, his life is lived in a simulacrum. He tells us about his apartment, which is made up entirely of catalogue fragments, as it is literally shown in the film. The Narrator even admits that he furnishes the apartment with items bought not for their functionality or practical purposes, but because they are marketed and advertised as the most chic and elegant personal effects: "I flipped through catalogues and wondered, 'What kind of dining set defines me as a

person?'" Sometimes he doesn't even know what makes them chic and elegant – his plates were made by the "honest, simple, hardworking, indigenous peoples of . . . wherever," he tells us, adding, "A house full of condiments and no food . . . how embarrassing." Baudrillard writes about how mass-media controls the perceptions of those like The Narrator who absorb it: ". . . the media are not a stage where something is played, they are a strip, a track, a perforated map of which we are no longer even spectators: receivers" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 160). The Narrator has no sense of identity, and he has sunk to defining himself externally through arbitrarily formulated status symbols sold by cold, impersonal retail companies. He has no identity, we get the sense, because he hasn't had any real experiences – his life has been lived in the simulacra that are his job and his consumption. Just like the circumstances of his professional life, his home life is made up of a series of infinite reproductions. His apartment isn't *his*. It belongs to the designers and marketers who invent, reproduce, and sell it. This infinite reproduction of an apartment, this "copy of a copy of a copy," is now "more real than real," just like the replicants in *Blade Runner*. The Narrator wouldn't even know how to put together a real home of his own. He only knows what has been sold to him by others. This is the essence of simulation and hyperreality; the simulated has surpassed the real – "the map precedes the territory" now, as Baudrillard insists (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1). The concept of a *real* home, a *real* apartment conceived of and formulated by one's self, doesn't exist in The Narrator's world. The prefabricated – the simulated – is all that exists and has meaning to him.

Dissatisfied as he is with all this, The Narrator moves on to the support groups to try to make that elusive human connection he so obviously craves. But, unequipped as he is for such a connection due to his isolation and disconnection from his own emotions, he merely trades one simulacrum for another. All of the "connections" he makes at the support groups are inauthentic, as they're all based on his lies and feigning of illnesses. "I was the warm little center that the life of this world crowded around," The Narrator tells us. He is only interested in how the support group people make *him* feel, and that isn't a real human connection. Ironically, it is at these support groups that The Narrator meets Marla, the one person with whom he has instant chemistry, as the audience is meant to see right away. One would think that it would be obvious to someone that when two people meet while serially faking illnesses and disorders at support groups, they must be "meant for each other," in the traditional sense. But The Narrator cannot see, or feel, anything. He pushes Marla away, thus insuring his solitude, which is exactly the last thing he needs.

It is at this juncture that The Narrator meets Tyler, who he interestingly has no problem sensing an immediate similarity to and connection with. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the charismatic Tyler seems to have laser-like insight into The Narrator's mind, or that Tyler also seems to have all the qualities and attitude that The Narrator wishes for himself. In her article "So Good It Hurts," Amy Taubin illustrates the process by which the forces and demands of life in the hyperreal flux trigger The Narrator's *becoming*; he is seduced by the ideas of escape from and empowerment beyond his simulated reality. Taubin writes:

> Tyler . . . has invaded the life of our protagonist and narrator . . . [The Narrator] is a depressed wage-slave with terrible insomnia, a corrosive wit and a dissociated perspective on his sterile IKEA life. Tyler encourages him to turn his frustration and bottled-up rage into action . . . This is the beginning of Fight Club, a secret society open to anyone who's male and for which Tyler (the self-styled anarchist) lays down the rules . . . For the protagonist, who feels emasculated by his buttoned-down, consumerist life, Tyler represents some ideal of free-wheeling . . . power. He wants to become Tyler or to be taken over by Tyler. (16-17)

It is the moment that Fight Club begins that The Narrator's journey, his *becoming*, begins. As Nietzsche instructed, the *becoming* is a journey and a perpetual state of flux and growth; The Narrator has thus embarked on his journey, one that will unfold and progress throughout the rest of *Fight Club*'s narrative. With Tyler's driving force behind him, The Narrator begins to subject himself to the things he (believes he) fears most – disorganization, chaos, and destruction. In their essay "Enjoy Your Fight! – *Fight Club* as a Symptom of the Network Society," Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen write about the empowering nature of dealing with and *overcoming* pain, and the significance of the process by which this empowerment is achieved:

> The aim is not to become immune towards pain but to live through it. Being hit and feeling pain is a way to re-conquer life. The practice of Fight Club invokes a life with scars. "I don't want to die without any scars," [Tyler] says. Why the body and why scars? The body is that

> which is not just a "copy of a copy of a copy." And it is *my* body . . . the scar on the body is lasting. It cannot be changed like clothes . . . If the experience has disappeared, bodily harm offers an experience of life (and death). Through fighting, fighters feel the finality of life, and life itself. (357)

This is key to the *becoming*, as The Narrator must face and *overcome* the things he fears if he is to *become*, as fear is an obstacle that will stand in the way of attaining the self-confidence, self-sustenance, and self-awareness that are vital to the *becoming*. Surviving and embracing life lived on the edge – in the midst of disorganization, chaos, and destruction – are the ways to break free from the endlessly repetitive simulacra that The Narrator has become trapped in. Fight Club is his chance to experience something real, and something as painful and scary as a brutal beating. But The Narrator survives and comes to embrace the fights, and this helps him reconnect with his humanity, and reconnect with and master his reality. In his article "Getting Exercised Over *Fight Club*," Gary Crowdus writes:

> . . . [The Narrator] and other Fight Club members have become so physically impassive, so emotionally anesthetized, and so spiritually numb . . . it takes a broken nose, a split lip, or a few cracked ribs to reawaken their deadened nervous systems and to provide them with a meaningful sense of . . . identity. (47-48)

Like Rick Deckard, The Narrator is lost at the narrative's beginning; also like Deckard, he is portrayed as jaded, disconnected, and depressed, as his years of living in simulacra

have no doubt taken their toll through the suffocating and endlessly repetitive artificiality that they consist of. As was the case with Deckard, The Narrator was not *living*; he was merely *existing*, day after day, weary and inert. But Fight Club is the mechanism by which The Narrator *overcomes* his former lifeless inertia, and this is the catalyst that begins the journey of his *becoming*.

The Narrator's seduction by Tyler and his ideas illustrates an intriguing dynamic. It is easy to see why The Narrator is initially so drawn to and enamored by Tyler; The Narrator lives a life controlled by his job and the mass-media and consumer industries, while Tyler clearly is his own master in every way, and never allows himself to be denied what he wants. In his article "*Fight Club*," Charles Whitehouse characterizes this dynamic, and its subsequent fallout:

> Tyler seems to be completely free from any inhibition, able to acquire anything he wants through sheer force of will. [The Narrator's] exhilaration at meeting Tyler is undercut by Tyler's immediate sexual success with Marla and then dissipated when he (Tyler) fills their squatted house with Fight Club legions, organized to carry out terror missions. (46)

Whereas The Narrator thinks he has finally made the human connection he has for so long been subconsciously craving, he soon learns that Tyler has his own, far less altruistic agenda. The Narrator needs Tyler, both to satisfy his need for friendship and to further his *becoming*, but it becomes increasingly clear that Tyler doesn't need The Narrator, or anyone, for that matter, at least not in the way that The Narrator needs him. And Tyler immediately bedding Marla is insult to injury; even though The Narrator won't admit it to

himself or anyone else, The Narrator is attracted to Marla and desires a relationship with her, but still can't bring himself to pursue these things. Instead, The Narrator pursues an increasingly dysfunctional relationship with Tyler, while denying himself a real relationship with Marla. Tyler increasingly pursues his own agenda, one that becomes more and more dangerous to The Narrator – and everyone else.

Tyler's presence and influence do further The Narrator's *becoming*, as Tyler steadily pushes The Narrator into facing his fears and meeting new challenges, which The Narrator always does – and always with success, much to his (The Narrator's) surprise at times. This *overcoming* is, again, of crucial importance to the *becoming*. As The Narrator grows less and less afraid, nervous, and unsure, he grows more and more confident, proactive, and empowered. This growth, this evidence of the *overcoming* and the *becoming*, is clear from The Narrator's swiftly-found comfort in his move from his designer condo to Tyler's dilapidated house (which doesn't even have a television). From there, we see the changes in The Narrator's relationships with Marla, his boss, and his co-workers. Where he was once timid, passive, and easily dominated, he becomes intimidating, forceful, and dynamic. It becomes clear that Fight Club has gone a long way towards furthering The Narrator's *becoming*; before it, he had never been in a fight, and was clearly nervous and afraid about being in one – even a fake one. But Tyler and Fight Club teach him to live in the moment, to respond to the spontaneous with spontaneity, and – most importantly of all – that the strength, toughness, and resourcefulness that he discovers in himself were there all along. Before their first fight, Tyler asks The Narrator, "How much can you know about yourself if you've never been

in a fight?" Not nearly enough, The Narrator learns. As Nietzsche proclaims, self-knowledge is the first key component of the *becoming*. Without it, one cannot find that inner strength that one needs to face and *overcome* one's reality's challenges and obstacles. "You weren't alive anywhere like you were there," The Narrator tells us about Fight Club. It is in this arena that The Narrator reconnects with his passion for life, and it is this reconnection that is the catalyst for all of the furthering of the *becoming* that follows.

As was the case in *Blade Runner*, the reality in *Fight Club* is also one with no place for God or spirituality. Tyler makes this explicitly clear to The Narrator in a shocking and horrifying scene. As Tyler burns and permanently (and prominently) scars The Narrator's hand with lye, he tells The Narrator that God has abandoned them, just as their fathers had. This is irrelevant, Tyler assures The Narrator:

> You have to consider the possibility that God does not like you. He never wanted you. In all probability, he hates you. This is not the worst thing that can happen. We don't need Him! Fuck damnation, man! Fuck redemption! We are God's unwanted children? So be it! . . . you have to give up. First you have to know – not *fear*, *know* – that someday, you're going to die . . . *It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything*.

The theme of Tyler's harangue echoes Nietzsche's declaration that God is dead, for all practical intents and purposes, and that faith in and appeals to Him can only weaken and confine the individual and impede the *becoming*. (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* 23). To

become, one must reconcile one's self to and master one's reality. One must see and understand that reality accurately if one is to do these things. Most importantly of all, one must conceive and prepare for the worst case scenario. In this scene, Tyler strips away the last vestiges of who The Narrator was before he began the *becoming*. He completes The Narrator's disillusionment. The Narrator is now on his own, in what he now must accept as the only life he will ever live, and it is incumbent upon him to take the initiative and live it to the fullest.

Despite the growth and empowerment that Tyler has clearly fostered in The Narrator, it becomes clear later in the film that Tyler is The Narrator's doppelganger, his evil double, just as Batty was Deckard's in *Blade Runner*. But, in *Fight Club*'s great plot twist, it is revealed that Tyler is not another person. He and The Narrator are the same person, quite literally. Tyler is a dissociative identity, a projection of The Narrator's repressed id run amok. This dynamic is emblematic of just how disconnected from himself The Narrator had become. In order to connect with someone – *anyone* – The Narrator had to invent a person, a new self that possessed all of the qualities that he wished would the fill the void that had become his actual self. He wasn't even able to recognize himself as who Tyler was. Actually, The Narrator couldn't even connect with himself or his own feelings; he had to externalize and disembody those concepts and meet them – for the first time, poetically – in the form of a stranger. Terry Lee analyzes the particulars of this dynamic in his article "*Virtual Violence* in *Fight Club*: This Is What Transformation of Masculine Ego *Feels* Like":

> The ego, which is the personality that we identify as our self, and the unconscious, which is the dark, unknown aspect that includes what psychiatrist C. G. Jung called the *shadow*, are the large, constitutive parts of the psyche. The shadow is comprised of "what we're least willing to consider a part of ourselves," but what we often need, for brief periods, to balance our lives (Whitmont 162). In [The Narrator's] case, the shadow contains a tough fighter who thrives on being bad, not good; on living in a dirty pit, not an IKEA palace – on having women, not sofas. Tyler has just what [The Narrator] needs. And Tyler, of course, is part of [The Narrator] . . . Tyler, then, embodies [The Narrator's] own repressed strengths, qualities that are useful, when contacted for short periods in the service of making transformative change, but which cannot be – or *shouldn't be* – acted out in everyday life. [The Narrator] needs to awaken from his consumer numbness, his deadened, emotionless life: the old [Narrator] needs to die, so a new [Narrator] can come to life. (420)

So just as The Narrator needed, Tyler has broken him out of his consumer-office-worker trance and reconnected him to himself, his initiative, and his strength. As we come to understand, it was "Tyler" who caused the explosion that destroyed The Narrator's apartment. This event was, of course, the catalyst that began The Narrator's "relationship" with Tyler, and the *becoming* that followed. "You were looking for a way to change your life," Tyler tells The Narrator after having revealed his true nature to him, "You could not do this on your own." Tyler has indeed brought The Narrator into a new

life, a new existence; the old Narrator has been irrevocably eliminated, and a new Narrator has risen from the ashes.

From *Blade Runner* to *Fight Club*, there is a progression in the doubling concept, and a collapsing of the level of stratification between the primary character and the doppelganger. In *Blade Runner*, the primary character (Deckard) and the doppelganger (Batty) were two separate, unrelated people whose journeys intersected at a mutually vital point. In *Fight Club*, the struggle between the primary character and the doppelganger is the struggle of one person with himself; the dynamic is far more personal and internal. This progression highlights the Nietzschean idea of the *becoming* being a journey that concerns and consists of only the individual; while it was dramatically satisfying and poetic that the journeys of Deckard and Batty were intertwined and inversely analogous, the more singular dynamics of *Fight Club*'s doubling element is more consistent with Nietzsche's intention of the *becoming* being regarded as a journey the individual undertakes all alone. As it turns out, The Narrator *is* all alone on his journey. He has no one to lean on or learn from but himself. More importantly, he has no one to "save" him like Deckard does; where Batty arrived in the guise of the antichrist and became the savior, Tyler arrives in the guise of the savior and becomes the antichrist. Once again, in a perfectly ironic and perverse twist, The Narrator must save himself from "himself," only this time he must *overcome* his evil half instead of his once passive, impotent former self.

As *Fight Club* develops, so too does Tyler in the function as the evil double. As the film progresses, Tyler transforms from a charmingly insouciant and witty companion

into an increasingly angry and violent cult leader with a messianic complex. Eventually, as Terry Lee argues must inevitably happen, The Narrator realizes that Tyler has outlived his purpose, and that Tyler must now die if he (The Narrator) is to live. Again, this is perfectly ironic and paradoxical, as the first important "changeover" of the story, as the Narrator calls it, was The Narrator's initial identity (or, more accurately, complete lack thereof) needing to die so that a new, superior identity could be forged. With that phase of the *becoming* attained, it is the Tyler identity that has become obsolete and obstructive, and which now needs to be *overcome*.

The film has now reached the chronological point at which it began, with Tyler holding a gun in The Narrator's mouth. As Tyler's doomsday plan to induce financial Armageddon nears its final stage, The Narrator tells him that he has gone too far, and that he wants Tyler to stop. "This is what we want," Tyler says calmly, still in control of The Narrator's mind. "*I* don't want this," The Narrator protests. This marks the first time that The Narrator defines himself directly to Tyler in an oppositional manner. Tyler angrily reminds The Narrator of all he has done for him, asking, "How far have you come because of me?!" Tyler refuses to abort the plan, and The Narrator finally takes control. The gun in Tyler's hand that he has been bullying The Narrator with suddenly appears in The Narrator's hand instead, and he puts it to his head. Tyler, sensing that he is losing control, tries to relent. "It's you and me," he tells The Narrator, and then asks, "Friends?" Only a short time ago, this was all The Narrator wanted, to be Tyler's friend. But again, The Narrator has realized that Tyler has outlived his purpose, and that it's time for him to move on without Tyler. The Narrator holds firm, and tells Tyler, "My eyes are

open." He pulls the trigger, blowing out a cheek, and Tyler is no more. After all he has been through in the fights in Fight Club, The Narrator can take this gruesome but necessary wound in stride. The film ends with The Narrator and Marla holding hands, finally able to admit and embrace their feelings for each other.

The Narrator has taken the final step in his *becoming*; he has *overcome* all of the obstacles that had left him disconnected from himself and others, and that had left him at the mercy of his consumer culture and his soul-deadening, energy-sapping job. Most importantly, he has *overcome* all of the elements of simulation and hyperreality that he had been trapped by. From his condo and job to the support groups to his "relationship" with Tyler, The Narrator had spent the film trading one simulated reality for another, moving from simulacrum to simulacrum no longer connected to the real in any meaningful sense. There was nothing grounded in reality in The Narrator's world that he could recognize or hold onto – not himself or even Tyler, as it turned out. He existed entirely within the flux of the hyperreal, and it was the force and power of that flux that threatened to pull apart the very fiber of The Narrator's identity.

But The Narrator *overcame* and reclaimed his identity – from his job, his condo, his culture, and finally from Tyler. At the film's end, he has found that real thing that he can hold onto, and it is the same thing that Deckard found at the end of *Blade Runner* – love. The Narrator ultimately rejects both the mainstream consumer culture he had defined himself by and Tyler's brand of soulless anarcho-fascism. What he has gone through – *all* of it – has taught him that life, as Nietzsche taught, is not about *being*. Life is not about lethargically existing from day to day, inert and being led and determined by

the circumstances of one's reality. Life, as Nietzsche directed, is about *becoming*. To live is to grow, and growth requires *all* of life's experiences, even those that are painful and frightening. One cannot live in a safe, prefabricated nest and truly *live*. It is The Narrator's self-subjection to all of the pain, chaos, and uncertainty that he faces and *overcomes* that brings him to the point he arrives at by the film's close. The Narrator was ultimately proactive and took control of his life and his *becoming*.

By the end of the film, The Narrator has learned that his identity is not defined by what he has, or what his job is, or how much mayhem he can cause. He learns that identity needn't be defined at all. The key is being *proactive*, not *reactive*; as long as he can determine and decide who he is and what he does for and by himself, without having to worship at an altar of someone else's design, The Narrator's identity is his own. Having left all of the simulation and violence (and everything in between) behind, The Narrator is ready for the next new, unfamiliar experience in his life – a real relationship with someone he loves, and who loves him back. The Narrator is ready to continue to live life to its fullest, but this time to the positive extreme, and that extreme is love. The Narrator has *overcome* his lack of identity and found that he does not need to define himself by any standard. He has mastered his reality by learning, through all of his positive and negative experiences during the course of the film, that there is nothing that his reality can throw at him that he cannot handle or deal with. With his self-confidence and initiative firmly in place, The Narrator has, like Rick Deckard before him, achieved a higher level in the *becoming*.

V.

Miami Vice

Michael Mann's *Miami Vice*, the 2006 film adaptation of his television series of the same name that ran from 1984-1989, meditates on what composes identity and its mercurial nature. The film also explores what effects a simulated identity, consciously acted out in a simulated reality, has on an actual one. Where is the line between the two identities drawn, who draws it, and can living within the forces and pressures of a simulated reality perhaps make the simulated identity more "real" than the "real" one?

We meet the film's protagonists, detectives James "Sonny" Crockett (Colin Farrell) and Ricardo "Rico" Tubbs (Jamie Foxx), when we are dropped right into the middle of a trendy Miami nightclub with them. It becomes clear very quickly that they are there with their vice unit and that an operation is in progress. As things quickly turn tense and violent in the nightclub, Crockett gets a call. An informant he had worked with several months ago is in the midst of a panicked escape, and he tells Crockett that he (the informant) has been compromised and that he was forced to give up undercovers. He assures Crockett that he didn't give either he or Tubbs up, but that somehow the drug dealers he was working with knew he was an informant. Crockett and Tubbs must bail out on the case in the nightclub, and they are able to track down the informant on the road. When it is confirmed that the informant's significant other has been murdered, he steps in front of a truck, and the detectives find out shortly thereafter that the same drug dealers murdered an undercover FBI agent earlier the same night during a deal.

Right from the beginning, it is established that the world inhabited by Crockett and Tubbs is one of a perpetual present tense; for the entirety of the sequences described above, the energy and the importance of the circumstances is derived from their immediacy. "That is the hand that we have been dealt at 11:47 p.m. on Saturday night," Crockett tells another cop about the situation with the informant. He goes on, "Now I do not know what case you have him on, but it is going bad, and it sounds like it is going bad right now." The work that Crockett and Tubbs do, and indeed the very lives they lead, all exist entirely within the moment ("right now"), and right away the edgy and dangerous nature of undercover work and the simulated lives and identities it requires is made clear. In an instant, a situation can change completely, and death and violence are never far off.

It is determined that a law enforcement leak is transpiring. Since Crockett's and Tubbs's undercover status has not been compromised, they are sent in to uncover how the drug dealers obtained the information that led to the FBI agent's murder, and how these dealers are operating. Once Crockett and Tubbs are able to infiltrate the necessary circles, they find that a transnational drug cartel armed with the most sophisticated technology and infrastructure is doing big business in Miami, and these criminals are as brutal and ruthless as they are efficient and sophisticated. Because of the skills and dedication that Crockett and Tubbs possess, they are able to gain access into this drug cartel and eventually succeed in becoming partners in it, in the guise of drug runners. This already delicate and dangerous situation becomes even more complicated when Crockett and the drug cartel kingpin's woman, Isabella (Gong Li), fall in love. Crockett must now juggle

his commitment to his work and partners with his feelings for a woman he can't trust. As Crockett capably balances infiltrating and investigating the inner workings of the cartel with continuing and deepening his affair with Isabella, the kingpin's right-hand man Jose Yero (John Ortiz) grows increasingly suspicious of Crockett and Tubbs. As he schemes to outmaneuver them, he searches for the circumstances and the means that will allow him to do away with Crockett and Tubbs before they realize that he has double-crossed them.

Crockett and Tubbs thus find themselves up against living dual identities of opposing interests, the risk of being discovered by the criminals they are trying to bring down, the precision of the state-of-the-art technology that the drug cartel is armed with, and of course the possibility that they will fail to apprehend the criminals that they have been charged with capturing. Added to this is the unrelenting pressure and stress of living a simulated identity in a life-threatening situation while trying to remain true to an actual one, all while trying to maintain and protect the relationships with loved ones who are inescapably endangered by the work that Crockett and Tubbs do and the simulated criminal identities they must keep up. How Crockett and Tubbs live, work, and succeed in the harsh circumstances described above – and what they gain and sacrifice while doing so – constitute the journeys of the *overcoming* and the *becoming* that *Miami Vice*'s narrative centers on.

Miami Vice is a preeminent example of a postmodern cop film. In the service of the law, there are no "good guys" and "bad guys," in the traditional sense, any longer. Essentially, the film seems to endorse the idea that best strategy for optimal detective

work and law enforcement is to out-criminal the criminals. In this sense, *Miami Vice* is post-morality and post-regulation; the end justifies the means in the careers of Crockett and Tubbs. Crime has become so prevalent, so sophisticated, so formidable, that the only way to stop it is to fight fire with fire. Crockett and Tubbs are as skilled and capable as criminals as they are as cops; they even commit crimes – as criminals – in the name of the law, of course. Due to the information they are privy to and the experience they have gained through their work as police, Crockett and Tubbs have learned to get inside the criminal mind and think like criminals. In effect, they *are* criminals. Criminals make the best cops, *Miami Vice* proposes, so we should all be thankful that the criminals on the side of the law are as dedicated, as proficient, and as ruthless as the criminals on the other side are.

Of course, the stress and pressure of living a simulated criminal identity is considerable, but for our postmodern cops, it's all in a day's work. They are as adept and comfortable when carrying out criminal activity as they are when they are doing police work. When the vice unit, as a team, robs a team of drug runners and destroys the high-performance racing boats that they use to smuggle product, they do so efficiently and emotionlessly, using the necessary violence. Tubbs dryly asks Crockett, "who are we," meaning who are they pretending to be that night, before the operation, and the two then behave accordingly. Crockett and Tubbs are the next level of police officer, of law enforcer. Enforcing the law doesn't require following it. But when Crockett and Tubbs want to live their lives outside of their jobs, that's when the difficulties arise. Crockett and Tubbs each split one life into two identities, and each identity threatens to encroach

upon and endanger the other. These are postmodern cops that have to deal with postmodern problems; they have to be cops and criminals at once, opposites in the same existence, and at times this is a confusing life to lead that causes much cognitive dissonance. Crockett and Tubbs live lives that are, in a sense, upside down. They do bad things for a good cause, and both men find their personal relationships in jeopardy because of it.

It is the simulation that both men willingly participate in that is the key to understanding the lives they lead and the reality they live in. Jean-Baptiste Thoret, in his *Senses of Cinema* essay "Gravity of the Flux: Michael Mann's *Miami Vice*," describes the dynamics of this simulation:

> The post-urban (and post-human) world of *Miami Vice* is a confused, fragmented and controlled world that holds together only by the financial flux that crosses it and the electronic images (surveillance cameras, radars, computer screens, etc.) recreating the simulacrum. There is no other logic than that of offer and demand, of movement in all directions imposed by economic private interests. Little matter, then, whether the goods are legal or not; little matter, too, the nature of the market, since the film treats capitalism like a war . . . the world of *Miami Vice* has lost its center of gravity and seems devoted to a paradoxical movement: illusion of speed (or rather haste) but effect of being stuck. (http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/07/42/miami-vice.html)

Miami Vice's reality is thus *hyperreality*; all is determined by the economy and trade of the product. All that matters in the world in which Crockett and Tubbs operate is who has the product and how much they can sell it for. From this set of constructs all else is generated, in this specific hyperreality. The map now precedes the territory. Whereas once the economy of goods and services was the *result* of, and determined by, larger societal and relational factors, in *Miami Vice*'s reality economic private interests and the financial flux are the only active factors. They are, indeed, the sole driving factors in the capitalistic war being waged between the cops and the criminals, and the abundant and dizzying ultra-technology that reproduces and perpetuates the simulacrum is what connects it all. Actually, it is partially because of these circumstances that Crockett and Tubbs are able to gain access into and succeed inside of the criminal underworld. Because all that matters is making more and more money, the people making it are only concerned with hiring the most skilled and capable people they can find to enable them to do it. It doesn't matter *who* such people are, as long as they can get the job done better than anyone else. So Crockett and Tubbs need only be the most skilled and capable drug runners around (and, of course, have their true identities concealed to the most technologically advanced and impenetrable extent possible), and they know they'll get the job. In a sense, it all amounts to keeping score of a virtual game, with the cops on one side and the criminals on the other. But it is a game with no end. This is a world that goes nowhere fast, as Thoret intimates. The money is moved around, people profit, and people die. On and on it goes, a world with only commodities (drugs) and no real progress. There is no endpoint or goal, even, beyond the acquisition of profit. The drug

kingpins and managers in *Miami Vice* don't *do* anything, other than amass wealth. There are the *simulations* of movement (money and product changing hands), of progress (business being done better and more efficiently after Crockett and Tubbs take over drug running functions for the cartel), and of accomplishment (tasks completed, deals made, and businesses built), but ultimately all that ever changes is the size of the bank accounts. It is a never-ending simulacrum in which there will always be a drug trade, and there will always be cops trying, with varying levels of only fleeting success, to interrupt it.

The simulated world in which Crockett and Tubbs operate necessitates and reinforces their simulated identities. It is a world in which everything has been flattened, in the differential, hierarchical sense. It doesn't matter who people *are*, because it's only about what they *do*. As long as they can make people money and aren't a threat to the financial system and interests of those they work for, it is irrelevant what their "identity" is. Thoret illustrates the elements of perception as reality and the supremacy of the system:

> *Miami Vice* is a film on confusion, indistinction and the equivalence of opposites. The cop is [not] the reversed double of the drug dealer, but his distant echo, his replica . . . infiltration does not constitute an infringement of the general Law of global system that has resolved contradictions and confused positions. In this obscure indecipherable without limits, what one *really* is (a cop, a crook) no longer matters. The only thing that counts is the trace that one leaves in the system, the stamp that one leaves there . . . No matter the differences as soon as one discharges the same

> image . . . In *Miami Vice*, the image is not deduced from reality, but reality from the image.

Here again we see that image (the map) has superseded and replaced reality (the territory). This is, of course, exactly the essence of hyperreality. The simulacrum in which Crockett and Tubbs do their work is a world comprised entirely of surfaces; there is nothing beyond the images and tasks, which is exactly what makes the work the undercover cops do and the access they achieve possible. Functionally, identity doesn't exist in this world. People exist only according to the functions they perform; they have no inner self or outside life that exists, because these things serve no purpose and make no money in this world. Even the "personal" relationship between the drug kingpin Arcangel de Jesus Montoya (Luis Tosar) and Isabella is purely business and functional. They aren't married and aren't sexually exclusive, and when she no longer serves his purposes, he tosses her away to be disposed of by Yero. Even the sexual relationship between them is purely to quench Montoya's desire and libido; Isabella seems merely uncomfortable and grudgingly dutiful with Montoya, especially when compared to her passionate and blissful affair with Crockett. Montoya is even approving and appreciative when Isabella tells him that she had sex with Burnett (Crockett's undercover name) in order, she lies, to gain the upper hand business-wise. This world is constituted solely of profit-building and its associated functions; there is no place for any other types of identities, relationships, or utility.

The most prominent example of the intersection of postmodernism and simulation occurs in the initial meeting between Crockett, Tubbs, and Yero. Yero is suspicious of

the two, as he of course would be of any new potential associates. When he questions their credentials and ability, they respond angrily and impatiently, and with force and moxie equal to Yero's. Yero then tries to use his armed henchmen to intimidate them. Another undercover vice cop immediately tosses Crockett a grenade, and he pulls the pin and holds it in front of Yero. Crockett and Tubbs then go on the offensive, accusing Yero of working with the cops (!) and insulting his business sense. Yero is grudgingly impressed (but of course doesn't let it show), and we know this because with these actions Crockett and Tubbs "prove" themselves as legit criminals. Again, they "out-criminal" the criminals. They "out-bad" the bad guys. As Thoret claims, all that matters in this simulated, superficial world is image. "Burnett" and "Cooper" (Tubbs's undercover name) *look* like drug runners, *talk* like drug runners, and *act* like drug runners, so they *are* drug runners, for all intents and purposes. Seeing their lack of fear in the face of his power proves it to Yero, and it is this lack of fear that ultimately eliminates any difference between the cops and the criminals. If they hadn't *overcome* their fear a long time ago, Crockett and Tubbs wouldn't be able to do their jobs. The criminals have no fear, so neither must Crockett and Tubbs. These are postmodern cops; they are criminals at the same time, with the knowledge and experience of each identity complementing and augmenting the other.

The narrative trajectory of *Miami Vice* is a significant departure from those of *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club*. In those films, the protagonists are introduced before their *becoming* begins, and the journey of the *becoming* has a narrative endpoint. In *Miami Vice*, Crockett and Tubbs are already well upon the journey of the *becoming*, and the

journey will continue after the narrative ends. This is much more consistent with the journey Nietzsche describes in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. It is important to remember that the *becoming* is not a journey that has an end. It is about life lived in a constant state of flux, from which comes a constant state of growth. The *becoming* demands a continual self-subjection to the harshest challenges and most formidable elements of one's reality. If one can meet these challenges and *overcome* these obstacles, then one is the master of his reality; he is self-reliant and self-sustaining, and thus self-determining. He has proven to himself that he is strong enough and tough enough to deal with and surmount whatever his reality will demand of him.

It is clear that Crockett and Tubbs have been doing these things for quite some time, since long before the audience is introduced to them. Their self-confidence and obvious skill in their work proves this. They succeed in seamlessly infiltrating the criminal underworld, outmaneuvering and even intimidating Yero. *Miami Vice* is a quintessentially Nietzschean film; it is precisely about how these men contend with and succeed in a dangerous and unforgiving reality, one in which they must live half their lives in the simulated identities of the archcriminals that it is their job to hunt and bring down. There is no remedy, and certainly no sympathy, for what this job costs these men. There will be no tears for the inner turmoil and cognitive dissonance that repeatedly stepping into and living the identity of the enemy can cause. The threat to the safety of loved ones if covers are blown is an ever-present necessary evil. Are there undercovers who become burned out or consumed by the long hours of life lived as an outlaw? There must be. Nothing can be done about these things. The work that these men do is

essential to protecting and serving the public. It is highly sensitive and difficult work that very few people have the endurance and the right skill set for, and clearly Crockett and Tubbs are at the top of their game. So protecting and serving the innocent and otherwise defenseless public obligates them to do the work that no one else but they can do. Walking away – quitting – is not an option. Our society needs Crockett and Tubbs. So they do their work, and every day they grow stronger and tougher for it, and *become* more and more the masters of their reality.

Just as Deckard and Batty were doubles in *Blade Runner* and The Narrator and Tyler were doubles in *Fight Club*, so too do Crockett and Tubbs have their doubles. But there is a progression of the doubling concept from the aforementioned films to *Miami Vice*. The doubles of Crockett and Tubbs are their criminal alter-egos, Burnett and Cooper. It is these identities that represent, and are essential to, the furthering of their respective *becoming*. It is because of these simulated identities that our protagonists are tested; living the dual identities of both themselves and of Burnett and Cooper in their simulated reality is the fundamental factor of all of the challenges and obstacles that Crockett and Tubbs must face and learn to *overcome*.

In *Blade Runner*, the protagonist (Deckard) and his double (Batty) were two separate individuals. In *Fight Club*, the protagonist (The Narrator) and his double (Tyler) were the same person, although the protagonist was not aware of it for most of the film. In *Miami Vice*, each protagonist and his double are also the same person, but there is no solipsism or delusion. There is no one who is unaware that he is living two identities, and in *Miami Vice* these identities are neither separate nor independent. Each protagonist

is consciously living two identities simultaneously. This dynamic brings the protagonists and their doubles closer than we have previously seen in any of the films being analyzed. The level of stratification between the protagonist and his double is much smaller in *Miami Vice* than it is in *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club* precisely because of the fact that Crockett and Tubbs are knowingly and willfully enacting their doubles, with a clear purpose and in the service of both a comprehensible goal as well as the greater good. Because of these factors, the doubles in *Miami Vice* cannot be called "evil." Moreover, the film is of a post-moral condition. But the criminal alter-egos do haunt the protagonists, which does give them a doppelganger-like quality. Crockett and Tubbs can never truly escape Burnett and Cooper; there *is* no escape from the omnipresent hyperreality in which they all exist, and Crockett and Tubbs must live with the reality that at any moment the world that the identities of Burnett and Cooper come from and work in could invade and threaten their true identities. But Crockett and Tubbs are not merely haunted by the simulated identities that they must enact; they must *overcome* their conscious enactment of these identities and the consequences that this enactment has. Crockett and Tubbs must not only guard against the violation of their personal lives by the world of their simulated criminal identities. They must also be strong enough to avoid falling prey to the stress and pressure of enacting these identities.

Of course, Crockett and Tubbs must have their indulgences, their sources of relief and comfort from their stressful and dangerous work. It is here that our two protagonists diverge from each other. Tubbs has Trudy (Naomi Harris), his romantic partner and fellow vice cop. That Trudy is also an undercover (and thus working in and subject to the

same stressful, dangerous, and unrelenting flux of the same simulated hyperreality) is a significant narrative element. Not only does this give Tubbs and Trudy an inherent understanding of what the other is subjected to and must *overcome*, but it proves that one cannot entirely escape the hyperreal flux. Even at home, away from work and in the arms of a loved one, the job is always at least quasi-present. So too, then, must be its stresses and dangers. Thus, any respite or shelter from the flux must always be fleeting.

Crockett, on the other hand, is a lone gun. Unlike Tubbs, Crockett does not have a "personal life;" he appears to be completely invested in his work, even beyond the enactment of his simulated identity. He can only long for such shelter, such a source of solace from the flux as Tubbs has found. Thoret explains a key scene in which Crockett's desire for a life outside of the hyperreal flux is made visible:

> At the beginning of the film, in a villa that looks like an aquarium, a long discussion gets under way between the Miami Dade team and Nicholas (Eddie Marsan), a dealer connected to the mafia's multinational company. The goal: to put Sonny and Ricardo in contact with members of the cartel. Standing near a bay window, Sonny leaves the conversation for a brief moment and turns towards the ocean. It's a moment of existential solitude characteristic of Mann's cinema (silence on the soundtrack, gaze lost on the horizon) that already indicates the desire of the character to extricate himself from the flux, to reinvent lost time. Sonny is the desire of an elsewhere, the perpetual will to disconnect from the world, mentally as well as physically, as the escapade at Havana testifies . . . Sonny embodies

> in his turn the Mannian imaginary of a mental and geographical extension, of a utopic elsewhere that the film will never realize but whose simulacrum it will fabricate (Havana). The two cops thus embody two divergent movements. Ricardo takes care of the police story and assures its upkeep; he is the man of stability (both in his love life and professionally) and of the centre. Sonny, on the other hand is unpredictable and instinctive; he carries in him a desire for rupture, deviation, and unbalance.

We see here another inversion, another paradox, in *Miami Vice* with regard to *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club*. In the latter films, one of the problems the protagonists faced and had to *overcome* was their disconnection from their realities. The remedy for Deckard and The Narrator was to find ways to plug into and master their realities. In Crockett's case, he is already mastering his reality; what he needs is exactly the opposite – to *disconnect* from his reality and find a space of time, a corner of the universe, in which he can *reconnect* to his *real* emotions, his *real* passions. Deckard and the Narrator do this by *reconnecting* to their realities, while Crockett needs to *disconnect* from his. This is another prime example of *Miami Vice* being about characters that are already in the midst of the *becoming*, whereas *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club* were about characters just beginning theirs.

The schism in characterization and role also marks an important distinction between Crockett and Tubbs. Crockett is the primary, dynamic protagonist; he is the one on the most forceful, rigorous journey, and is thus subject to the most change between the

film's beginning and its end. Tubbs represents, as Thoret points out, Crockett's counterpoints – steadiness, predictability, adherence to protocol, and contentment and satisfaction within the simulacrum. This doesn't mean that Tubbs is inert in terms of character development and growth. His is simply a different journey than Crockett's. Crockett's journey is about *overcoming* his discomfort and dissatisfaction with the present circumstances of his journey; Tubbs's is about continuing to face and *overcome* the challenges and obstacles that he has already accepted as part of his journey. Crockett has yet to accept his circumstances – the loneliness and emotional isolation, the force and stress of the flux of a simulated identity lived in a simulated reality, and the sense of living a life that is not his own. Tubbs has already accepted these circumstances and found his ways to deal and live with them – he has, as Thoret notes, already found his romantic partner within the system, and he accepts the rules and protocols of that system. Tubbs is not the risk-taker and rebel that Crockett is, for he has found the things that Crockett has not, and he is thus more content and level-headed. Because Tubbs has accepted and embraced the rules and circumstances that his life as a vice cop entails (and thus also mastered this reality), it could be said that he is further along in the *becoming* than Crockett is. Both have mastered their reality, but Crockett refuses to accept the conditions and imperatives of this reality. This, of course, gives him much more to deal with and reconcile himself to than is the case for Tubbs.

Crockett finds the solace and comfort – the escape from the simulated flux – that he desires in the arms of Isabella. During their initial meetings, the two immediately sense a similarity to each other, an inherent sameness; both long for that same escape

from their depersonalized lives within the same constructed, simulated reality. They both desire a real loving relationship with real emotion and a real human connection. Crockett and Isabella come to find these things in each other, and this mutual identification and the relationship it blossoms into provide the companionship and understanding that they both are so desperately in need of. But, because it is a relationship built upon Crockett's simulated Burnett identity, and because Isabella is under the absolute control of Montoya, it is not a relationship that can last. Even though they both know this, they can't help falling deeper and deeper in love. But the force and power of the flux of their shared simulated reality is too great; eventually, the system crushes everything that threatens to undermine it, which the real love and relationship between Crockett and Isabella does specifically because it must exist outside of this simulated reality. Real relationships like the ones between Crockett and Tubbs and Tubbs and Trudy can develop and survive in this reality, but only because they exist and function within it. A relationship like Crockett's and Isabella's cannot be, because they know that there is no permanent "elsewhere" outside of the hyperreal flux. Their simulated reality is omnipresent and all-inclusive, and thus the permanent space outside of it that their relationship would require to become permanent does not exist. All Crockett and Isabella can do is make the best of the stolen moments and brief intervals that they can pilfer from their all-encompassing hyperreality. Thoret describes the overwhelming power of the flux, and the noble but impossibly doomed resistance to it that Crockett and Isabella are for a short time able to construct:

> With *Miami Vice*, [the] tension between exterior and interior is completely reduced to the profit of a reticular world entirely subservient to the logic of the networks and the flux. Here, the spaces of resistance are disabled, almost nonexistent. Havana, haven of peace, is outside the flux and its exhausting topicality. In this sublime sequence, twelve minutes in weightlessness not a single one more, it is already time for Sonny to return (literally) to the dock. The counter space that Sonny and Isabella try to invent no longer holds together. Back in the flux, it explodes. The only possibility is to confuse the two, abolish the frontiers and submit to the rules of the network, like Ricardo and Trudy, lovers and co-workers . . . [Sonny and Isabella's] breakaway functions like a gasp of air, an attempt to recover a space against the flux, against topicality . . . In disconnecting from topicality (and from technology, not the slightest ring of the telephone), the film reconnects to the past, to History, to memories . . . Isabella has revealed snippets of her childhood, shows a photo of her mother to Sonny, recalls her origins; Sonny speaks to her of their future, of what she contemplates doing *after*. Flux is technology and technology . . . is death: it is the literal equivalence of the explosion of the mobile home, set off by Yero's mobile phone.

Crockett and Isabella find in their relationship that break, that shelter, from the hyperreal flux that they both so desperately want and need, but their love is star-crossed, and they know it. When Crockett, in a rare moment of weakness, suggests making it permanent –

suggests turning their admittedly fleeting affair into a real long-term relationship – Isabella reminds him that there is no escape from the hyperreal flux. "Look around you," she tells him. "Everything that you see is controlled by Arcangel de Jesus Montoya." Isabella knows that there simply is no "real" place outside of the hyperreal flux, no permanent break or escape from it. It can be hidden from for a momentary oasis of peace, like the ones they've been stealing, but eventually the hyperreal world always catches up, always wins. "Time is luck," Isabella tells Crockett. The problem is, as Sonny later accepts, that luck always runs out.

In *Miami Vice*'s overpowering, upside-down world, another strange irony is that Crockett knows exactly when it will run out. As Crockett and Tubbs prepare for their final showdown with Yero and the other dealers, Crockett knows that his time as "Burnett the Drug Smuggler and Cartel Partner" is almost up. "It's that time," Tubbs says to Crockett when they know the moment is imminent. "Badges flash, guns come out . . . fabricated identities collapse into one frame," Tubbs continues. The already-tenuous stratification between actual identity and simulated identity must eventually cease to exist, and this will happen in an instant, and there will be neither pause nor sympathy for what will be lost. Crockett knows that when his simulated identity collapses, there is no going back; that life – the one in which he and Isabella are lovers – will soon be over and irretrievable. Once Crockett reveals himself as a cop, he passes the point of no return. He confesses to Tubbs that he is not ready for this, but he goes through with it anyway; he really doesn't have a choice, as he and Isabella have already conceded to themselves and each other that their relationship cannot survive under *any*

circumstances, and all this even while she is unaware that drug smuggler Burnett is in fact vice cop Crockett.

It is at this point that *Miami Vice* surpasses *Blade Runner* and *Fight Club* as a Nietzschean film. In those films, love is the endpoint; when their protagonists find and embrace it, their narratives trajectories – the very journeys of the protagonists – are brought to a close. There is the sense that "love conquers all," and now that it has come to Deckard and The Narrator, there is nothing more that they need, and nothing left for them to learn or master or *overcome*. This is not at all what Nietzsche intended, and he in fact made himself quite clear in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* about his views on male-female relationships and their place in the *becoming*:

> . . . what is woman for man? Two different things wanteth the true man: danger and diversion. Therefore wanteth he woman, as the most dangerous plaything. Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly . . . A plaything let woman be, pure and fine like the precious stone, illumined with the virtues of a world not yet come . . . Let man fear woman when she loveth: then maketh she every sacrifice, and everything else she regardeth as worthless . . . Surface, is woman's soul, a mobile, stormy film on shallow water. Man's soul, however, is deep, its current gusheth in subterranean caverns: woman surmiseth its force, but comprehendeth it not. (80-81)

In the end, Crockett follows this description and these philosophies almost to the letter. He is, of course, a warrior in the truest sense, and danger and excitement are inextricably

linked to his work. He did *choose* to do the work he does, so clearly the danger and tension are things he is at the very least comfortable with, and he does seem to grow stronger and tougher as the danger and tension increase. In the first scene we see him, Linkin Park's "Numb" plays in the background: "I've become so numb / I can't feel you there / I've become so tight / So much more aware / I'm becoming this / All I want to do / Is be more like me / And be less like you /." As much as the stress and tension of the undercover work sap Crockett's emotional sensitivity, they heighten his senses, and make him that much more capable and self-aware. Capability and self-awareness are, of course, essential components of the *becoming*. Even the use of the word *become* in the song seems to evoke Nietzsche's philosophical use of it. The speaker in the song, obviously meant to be Crockett in the context of the scene, laments his increasing jadedness and callousness, and acknowledges that he is perhaps becoming too much like his criminal adversaries. This is significant, as later in the film it is ironically Montoya's relationship with Isabella that most closely approximates the above Nietzsche quote. Montoya, Crockett's fellow warrior and peer as well as adversary, uses Isabella as a sexual plaything and business tool until she outlives her usefulness to him. When she does, he emotionlessly tosses her away to Yero for disposal, making sure he uses her one last time for business purposes during the final shootout.

Even though the love Crockett and Isabella feel for each other is never in doubt, and Crockett is sincere when he proposes to Isabella a real future together for them, ultimately Crockett walks away from her. Although it seems that, by this point in the film, Isabella may now also desire a future with Crockett, it is all of no consequence.

"This was too good to last," Crockett mutters sadly. "Time is luck," Isabella repeats, equally morose. "Luck ran out," Crockett replies, with insurmountable finality. Thoret adeptly explains Crockett's and Isabella's final scene together:

> In the last sequence of the film, Sonny takes Isabella to a house by the sea, a deserted hideaway where a boat is waiting. Of their story, there remains nothing more than two faces framed in close-up, turned towards a horizon henceforth blocked. "It was too good to last," he says. Isabella takes off, alone, glancing one last time at Sonny. But no reverse shot is forthcoming: Sonny, already into his car, moves away and the optical axis that they formed together suddenly breaks. It is the moment to return to the flux. To give in. The world rediscovers its balance but loses a little more of its humanity. One of Sonny's replies to Isabella comes to mind: "We can do nothing against gravity." In other words, there is nothing to be done against the flux, except to extricate oneself for a short while. We end up always going back to it and dissolving therein (the last shot of the film). Sonny: "We have no future" . . . in *Miami Vice* the elsewhere is a lost cause. And melancholy is the only way of living on a long-term basis in the world. "One of these early mornings/Won't be very long/You will look for me/And I'll be gone," Patti LaBelle sings to the music of Moby at the beginning of their story – Isabella and Sonny on the way to Havana – but already at its end.

So unlike Deckard at the end of *Blade Runner* and The Narrator at the end of *Fight Club*, Crockett chooses to re-enter the flux, and thus continues the *becoming*. There are no remedies or resolutions to Crockett's simulated identity or reality, as there are for Deckard and The Narrator. There aren't even any real remedies or resolutions to *Miami Vice*'s narrative. The film ends with Crockett rejoining Tubbs and the rest of the vice unit, Isabella sailing alone into an uncertain future, Montoya escaping unscathed and with his empire intact, and the leak in the police force (the development that puts the film's plot into motion) undisclosed. Yero is killed, but he is nothing more than a simple and rudimentary cog in an expansive and complex system that will undoubtedly be replaced without being missed. In addition to emphasizing the invincibility of the film's hyperreality (nothing ever really changes in it, as it is designed, maintained, reproduced, and infinitely reproducible, as all simulacra by nature are), these dynamics further reinforce *Miami Vice* as a quintessentially Nietzschean film. They stress how the film exists entirely in the present – in the moment, the here and now – which is just what Nietzsche advises as the ideal environment for the *becoming*. It is in the moment that one must be at their most instinctive, their most self-reliant, and their most self-aware. Spontaneity and suddenness have a way of engendering resourcefulness and adaptation, and thus *overcoming*. *Miami Vice* has no beginning and no end. The film plays out in a perpetual present tense, reinforcing its world's manufactured hyperreality. Resistance to the gravity of this flux, which Thoret takes the title of his essay from, is futile. This element makes *Miami Vice* of a quintessentially Baudrillard-esque nature as well, since Baudrillard argues in *Simulacra and Simulation* that true hyperreality is both inescapable

and invincible, just as it is in *Miami Vice*'s world. Its characters all know this to be undeniably true. Both Deckard in *Blade Runner* and The Narrator in *Fight Club* are able to *overcome* their simulated identities and realities. In *Miami Vice*, the *overcoming* is far less complete and triumphant; it is about *overcoming* the stress and pain of living in the simulacrum, and living dual identities. But in *Miami Vice*, there is no *overcoming* hyperreality itself, no more than there could be an *overcoming* of time or space or the laws of physics. "You cannot negotiate with gravity," Crockett tells Isabella. All there is for him to do is soldier on, literally. He has left his companion and lover behind and has only more life, devoid of love and without his soulmate, spent in the unrelenting force of hyperreality ahead of him.

But this is the *becoming*, as Nietzsche instructs it to be; it is a journey that must be undertaken alone and without the frivolity and distraction that romantic love is, in the context of the *becoming*. Crockett and Isabella have their dalliance, she serves her "purpose," in Nietzsche's view, and then it is time for him to move on. As has been established previously, the *becoming* is not a finite process; it is life in a perpetual state of change, of growth, of flux. In the world of *Miami Vice*, that flux is both internal and external, and both components are vital to the *becoming*. The characters in *Miami Vice* have no choice; they are, and will continue to be, subject to the all-powerful, omnipresent hyperreal flux that *is* their world. Crockett is the prime example of adjustment, adaptation to, and mastery of such a world. He is the most high-functioning character in the film, precisely because he ultimately masters his reality most fully. He functions and succeeds in the hyperreal flux while living half his life in the simulated identity of the

enemy, and he doesn't let anything get in the way of doing his job to the best of his ability and to the greatest possible extent of his effort. Crockett is, in short, living to the fullest extent of his potential, as evidenced by the stress and danger of his work as well as what he must give up to do it as best he can. He constantly pushes himself to the limit, and this is the essence of the *becoming*. As he does this, he comes back for more and more over and over again, always furthering his *becoming*, always growing stronger and tougher.

Nietzsche closes *Thus Spake Zarathustra* by describing Zarathustra, and the path that is his future:

> "FELLOW-SUFFERING! FELLOW-SUFFERING WITH THE HIGHER MEN!" he cried out, and his countenance changed into brass. "Well! THAT – hath had its time! My suffering and my fellow-suffering – what matter about them! Do I then strive after HAPPINESS? I strive after my WORK!" . . . Thus spake Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun coming out of gloomy mountains. (349-350)

At the end of *Miami Vice*, Crockett, too, exits his "cave," the private hideaway in which he had taken shelter from the hyperreal flux with Isabella. With the work and stress of this most recent assignment behind him, Crockett re-enters the flux. Stronger and tougher than ever for what he has been subjected to, lost, and *overcome*, he re-emerges in the hyperreal flux; he emerges ready to get back to work, ready for more, ready to "strive

after his work," and thus the furthering of the *becoming*. Such is a quintessentially Nietzschean ending to a quintessentially Nietzschean film.

VI.

Concluding Remarks

My main goal in conducting this analysis has been to identify and illustrate an interesting relationship between the Nietzschean elements and the philosophies of Baudrillard present in *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice*. I chose these three films because I feel that they all embody and explore the issue of simulated realities produced and advanced through technological means. In each film, the central concern is how the protagonists deal with such realities and find the means to adapt to and master them.

It is important to note how crucial a factor infinite and mass-reproducibility is to the simulated realities present in each film. In *Blade Runner*, the replicants are manufactured and enhanced copies of humans designed to replace them when and where their makers deem it desirable. In *Fight Club*, The Narrator's entire life before Fight Club is a cookie-cutter "copy of a copy of a copy," infinitely reproduced and sold to millions of others just like him. Even the "space monkeys" that make up Project Mayhem, which is supposed to be the *antidote* to the reality just described, turn out to be merely mindless and reproduced copies of each other, in apparently endless supply and ironically just as lacking in identity and self-determining proactivity as The Narrator was at the beginning of *Fight Club*'s narrative. In *Miami Vice*, the entire economic and financial system is a simulacrum that survives through its infinite self-reproduction, and the simulated identities of the undercover cops would also have to be infinitely

reproducible, since they are conceived of and implemented arbitrarily. As technology, industry, and mass-media continue to make all manner of reality mass-producible and mass-reproducible, it becomes more and more imperative to recognize and value what about us is unique and inimitable, just as the protagonists do in their respective films.

As the world we live in becomes more and more dependent upon technology, and more and more dominated by a corporately-owned and ubiquitous mass-media, the danger of a mass-produced simulated reality controlled by those who would profit by and consolidate power through it increases as well. *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* each anticipate unique realities of a simulated nature, and investigate what can be done to offset, or at least best defend against, the effects of these realities. These films make it clear that each individual is responsible for their own strategy and defense against said effects, and that very little, if any, consequential aid or assistance will be forthcoming from any other people or institutions. This is where the concept of a personal and individual journey towards self-awareness and self-reliance becomes vital. *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, and *Miami Vice* all demonstrate such journeys, and how their protagonists find effective methods to confront and *overcome* realities of a simulated nature, or at least the effects of these realities. It is for these reasons that I find these three films to be so exceptional and important to consider and understand.

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